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COMM. R. I. INSTITUTE

KENILWORTH

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

ABRIDGED AND SIMPLIFIED BY

R. M. SPENCE, M.A.

INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE
PRINCIPAL, TRAINING COLLEGE, JUBBULPORE

WITH FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND IMPRESSION

COMMERCIAL INSTITUTE
KARAIKUDI

HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE
BOMBAY MADRAS
1925

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LIST OF CHIEF CHARACTERS

ALASCO (DOCTOR DEMETRIUS DOBOOBIE), a chemist and astrologer.
AMY, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart, and Countess of Leicester.
BADGER, WILL, servant to Sir Hugh Robsart.
BLOUNT, NICHOLAS, master of horse to the Earl of Sussex.
BOWYER, usher at Greenwich Palace.
BURLEIGH, LORD, a famous statesman.
FOSTER, ANTHONY, a tool of the Earl of Leicester.
ELIZABETH, Queen of England.
GOLDTHRED, LAURENCE, a cloth merchant.
GOSLING, GILES, landlord of the 'Black Bear' Inn.
HOLIDAY, ERASMUS, a schoolmaster.
HUNSDON, LORD, kinsman to Elizabeth.
JANET, daughter of Anthony Foster.
LAMBOURNE, MICHAEL, a soldier returned from the Netherlands.
LANEHAM, ROBERT, keeper of the council-chamber door.
LEICESTER, EARL OF, the Queen's favourite.
MARKHAM, a follower of the Earl of Sussex.
MASTERS, DR., physician to the Queen.
MUMBLAZEN, a dependant of Sir Hugh Robsart.
RALEIGH, WALTER, a courtier.
ROBSART, SIR HUGH, a country gentleman.
SLUDGE, DICKIE (FLIBBERTIGIBBET), an ugly urchin.
STAPLES, LAWRENCE, warder at Kenilworth.
SUSSEX, EARL OF, the rival of the Earl of Leicester.
TRACY, a follower of the Earl of Sussex.
TRESSILIAN, EDMUND, a friend of the Robsart family.
VARNEY, RICHARD, master of horse to the Earl of Leicester.
WAYLAND (WAYLAND SMITH), a blacksmith.

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CHAPTER I

AT THE 'BLACK BEAR' INN

THE village of Cumnor, within three or four miles of Oxford, boasted, during the eighteenth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, an excellent inn of the old stamp, kept by one Giles Gosling, a man of pleasant appearance and somewhat round figure, fifty years of age and upwards, moderate in his charges, prompt in his payments, having a cellar of good liquor, and a ready wit. No one excelled Giles Gosling in the power of pleasing his guests of every description, and both he and his inn, called the 'Black Bear', were famous among all travellers who had ever visited the neighbourhood.

In the courtyard of the inn a traveller alighted one evening, gave his horse, which seemed to have made a long journey, to the ostler, and was advancing towards the inn door, when he was met by the ample form of Giles Gosling himself. The landlord, with a hearty welcome, ushered his guest into a large, low chamber, where several persons were seated in different parties, some drinking, some playing cards, some talking, and some concluding their evening meal and arranging about their night's quarters.

The stranger was a well-built man, with not unpleasing features, yet he could not be called handsome, and his general appearance and manner were not such as to inspire trust. His behaviour was bold without being frank, and seemed to claim for him by bluster a degree of attention and deference which he feared would not be given willingly as his right. His attire was a riding-cloak, which, when open, displayed a handsome jacket overlaid with

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lace and belted with a girdle of yellow leather in which were hung a broadsword and a pair of pistols.

'You ride well provided, sir,' said the host, looking at the weapons as he laid on the table the wine which the traveller had ordered. 'Have you come from the wars in the Netherlands?'

'I have been far and near, my friend; but drink a cup of wine with me, and if it is not the best, remember it is your own.'

'Not the best?' said Giles Gosling, drinking off the cup and smacking his lips. 'Why, hold it up between you and the light, and you will see the little motes dance in the golden liquor like dust in the sunbeam. I trust your honour likes the wine?'

'It 's passable, mine host; but to know good liquor you should drink where the vine grows.'

'In truth, sir,' said Gosling, 'if I were to travel only that I might be discontented with what I can get at home, I should go on a fool's errand.'

'I am sure all your town's folk do not think so,' said the stranger. 'You have gallant fellows among you, I dare say, that have made a voyage to Virginia, or have gone to the Netherlands at least. Have you no friends or kinsmen in foreign parts that you would gladly have tidings of?'

'Not I,' answered the host, 'except one kinsman who left us in the last year of Queen Mary; but he is better lost than found.'

'Do not say so, friend. Many a wild colt has turned out a noble steed. His name, I pray you?'

'Michael Lambourne, a son of my sister's—there 's little pleasure in recollecting him.'

'What, no relation to Michael Lambourne, the gallant soldier who behaved so bravely at the siege of Venlo?'

'It could scarcely be my nephew,' said Gosling, 'for he had not the courage of a hen for anything but mischief.'

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'The Michael Lambourne whom I knew,' continued the traveller, 'was a fine-looking fellow, and was always gay and well-attired.'

'Our Michael wore a coat every rag of which was bidding good-bye to the rest, and had a hawk's eye for what he could steal. He was employed in this inn for three months, and, had he stayed for three more, his mistakes and misdeeds would have ruined me.'

'You would be sorry after all were I to tell you that poor Mike Lambourne was shot at the head of his regiment at the taking of a fort in the Netherlands.'

'Sorry! It would be the best news I ever had of him, for it would assure me that he was not hanged.'

'Don't say that, man,' replied the traveller; 'never fear but your nephew will be a credit to you yet. Can you tell me no mark by which I could judge whether they are the same?'

'Our Mike had the gallows branded on his left shoulder for stealing.'

'No, there you lie like a knave, uncle,' said the stranger; 'my shoulder is as unscarred as your own.'

'What, Mike, boy—Mike!' exclaimed the host; 'and is it you indeed? Well, I have thought so for this half-hour, since I knew that no other person would have taken so much interest in you. But if your shoulder is unscarred, the hangman was merciful and stamped you with a cold iron.'

'Have done with your jests, uncle, and let us see what welcome you will give a kinsman after eighteen years'

'You have brought back the traveller's gift of lying, Mike, and that was what you least needed to travel for.'

'I care not for your welcome or lack of welcome, uncle,' said Lambourne; 'I carry with me what will make me welcome, go where I will.' So saying he pulled out a purse of gold, the sight of which produced a visible effect upon the company, some of whom had known him in his wild

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youth. A few shook their heads and whispered to each other, and some, who were more sedate, left the inn, while one or two, less scrupulous, hastened to claim his acquaintance. Giles Gosling himself was not favourably impressed; he told his nephew that he could have a night's lodging without payment, but suggested that he should leave on the morrow, as he was too well known in the neighbourhood.

'For that matter,' replied Lambourne, 'I shall consult my own convenience. Meanwhile I wish to give a supper to those who are not too proud to remember me.' And he threatened that, if he could not have what he wanted for his money, he would go to the rival inn of the village. So Gosling was obliged to offer supper to all who chose to partake of it.

While the meal was being prepared, Lambourne talked with the rest of the company, telling them travellers' tales of Eldorado, where boys play marbles with diamonds, and the houses are roofed, and the streets are paved, with gold; and tempting one of them, Laurence Goldthred, a cloth merchant, to sell his house and land to furnish a ship which should sail to the New World with Michael himself as captain. The arrival of supper interrupted the conversation, which then turned to memories of Lambourne's youth; but some of the stories which the others recalled were so little creditable to him that he at length lost his temper and threatened to use his sword and dagger. At this point the worthy landlord interfered, and drew the attention of the company to another guest, who had been all this time sitting by himself in a corner.

The stranger was a man between twenty-five and thirty, somewhat above the middle size, and with an air of ease and dignity which suggested that his plain dress was rather beneath his rank. His countenance was thoughtful, with dark hair and dark eyes, which could sparkle during

Kennicott Academy

any excitement, but were usually meditative and tranquil. He had been at the inn for two days, but no one had found out who he was, or what his business was at Cumnor.

Honest Giles now approached him and invited him to join the company at supper, a courtesy which the stranger

THE BLACK BEAR' INN AT CUMNOR

at first declined; but the landlord insisted, hinting that people's suspicions would be aroused if he kept himself so much aloof, and urging him not to spoil the gaiety of the others by sitting in solitude. The stranger at last allowed himself to be persuaded, and Giles seized the chance of finding out something about him.

'By what name,' said he, 'shall I present you to these gentlemen?'

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'You may call me Tressilian,' was the reply.

'Tressilian! That is a Cornish name. Shall I say the worthy Mr. Tressilian of Cornwall?'

But the stranger would not satisfy his curiosity any further.

By this time the company, encouraged by the example of Michael Lambourne, were showing by their frequent and noisy laughter that they had reached the bounds of temperance; and Gosling, as he led the stranger towards the supper table, felt obliged to apologize for them, and to point out that they were not such a set of highwaymen as their present manners and conversation might lead him to think, and that all he had said about his nephew was not to be taken for gospel truth.

After supper, and a song by Master Goldthred, the cloth merchant, Michael turned the conversation once more to his old comrades, only to learn that they had all come to a bad end. One had been shot while poaching in the park of a neighbouring castle; another had been hanged for highway robbery; a third had been forced to fly from the country for taking part in a treasonable conspiracy. Finally he inquired after one named Anthony Foster, whom he called Tony Fire-the-Faggot, a nickname which he had earned by bringing a light to kindle the fire in which the Protestant martyrs, Latimer and Ridley, had perished in the Catholic Queen Mary's reign. To his surprise he learned that Foster was alive and thriving, but was now a Protestant and hated his old nickname; he lived near by in an old mansion named Cumnor Place, which he held by a grant from a great courtier, but scorned his old companions and would have nothing to do with the villagers of Cumnor.

'It is not pride alone that makes Tony behave so,' said the merchant. 'There's a lady in the case, and Tony will scarce let the light of day look on her.' He went on to tell how one day, instead of following the usual road,

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he had crossed the park surrounding Cumnor Place, and, passing close to the house, had seen her at a window. Tressilian, who had taken little or no part in the conversation up to this point, asked him to describe the lady, and Goldthred proceeded to describe her dress in minute detail, till he was interrupted by a gibe from Lambourne.

'A most tailor-like memory,' said he; 'the gentleman asks him of the lady's beauty, and he talks of her fine clothes.'

The merchant protested that he had had but little time to look at her; for just as he was going to wish her good-day, up came Tony Foster with a cudgel and drove him away with threats.

'Shame on you for a faint-hearted fellow!' exclaimed Lambourne; 'you have missed the rarest opportunity for an adventure.' And when Goldthred dared him to take the opportunity himself, he offered to wager five pieces of gold against a bale of the clothier's linen that he would go next day and force Foster to introduce him to the lady. The wager was at once accepted, and the landlord was appointed to hold the stakes, though he strongly disapproved of the proposed adventure.

'I would gladly pay half the risk, sir,' said Tressilian to Lambourne, 'to be permitted to accompany you in the adventure.'

'What would you gain by that, sir?'

'Nothing, sir,' said Tressilian, 'but the chance of witnessing the skill and valour with which you conduct yourself.'

'Come, then. I do not care how many witness my skill; and here I drink success to my enterprise.' But Lambourne had already drunk so much that with this last draught he lost all self-control. He grew furious with Goldthred, who refused, reasonably enough, to drink to the loss of his own wager, and as he attempted to draw his sword to attack him, he was seized by the servants of

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the inn and carried off to bed, there to sleep himself sober at his leisure. The party then broke up, and the guests took their leave.

CHAPTER II

TRESSILIAN DISCOVERS AMY

NEXT morning Tressilian greeted his host with an inquiry after his nephew.

'Is he well, and will he abide by his wager?'

The landlord answered that Michael had been out for two hours, but was now at breakfast.

'As for his wager,' he added, 'I caution you as a friend to have nothing to do with that, and to let him and Master Goldthred swagger about it as they please.'

Tressilian thanked him heartily for his advice, but said that he had given his word and must therefore stand by it; and he begged him for more information about Foster. But Giles had little to add to what had been said the night before.

'He was one of Queen Mary's Papists,' he said, 'and now he is one of Queen Elizabeth's Protestants. Above all, he was poor and is now rich, and only God and his conscience know how he came by his wealth. He has sulky ways too, and will have no intercourse with his neighbours, as if he had some strange secret to keep. I think it likely that Mike and he will quarrel, and I am sorry that you still think of going with my nephew.'

Meanwhile Tressilian ate an excellent breakfast, and had just finished when Lambourne entered, dressed very carefully in the newest fashion.

'How gay you are, lad!' said Gosling. 'To compare you with Master Tressilian here, in his sad-coloured riding-suit, who would not say that you were the real gentleman and he the inn-boy?'

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'In truth, uncle, no one would say so but one with your rustic manners, that knows no better; but I can pass as a gentleman with Tony Fire-the-Faggot, and that will do for the matter in hand.'

'You hold to your purpose, then, of visiting your old acquaintance?' said Tressilian.

'Yes, sir; when stakes are made, the game must be played. You, sir, unless my memory fails me, took some share in my wager.'

'I propose to accompany you,' said Tressilian, 'if you will do me so much honour; and I have placed my share of the stake in the hands of our worthy host.'

They then set out for the mansion of Anthony Foster. It was situated in a park full of large trees, chiefly ancient and mighty oaks, which stretched their giant arms over the high surrounding wall, giving the place a melancholy and secluded appearance. The entrance was an old-fashioned gateway with a great oaken door thickly studded with nails. Fortunately for our adventurers it yielded to a push, and they found themselves in an avenue overshadowed by huge oak trees and overgrown with grass, with here and there a pile of withered brushwood. The desolation of the place was felt even by Michael Lambourne.

'This wood is as dark as a wolf's mouth,' said he. 'Yet Foster is right to keep the place unattractive if he does not want visitors. But had he been as I once knew him, these sturdy oaks would long since have been cut down and sold.'

'May I ask', said Tressilian, 'why you so much desire to renew your acquaintance with him?'

'And may I ask in return why you so much desire to accompany me?'

Tressilian declared that his motive was simple curiosity, but Lambourne was not to be taken in so easily.

'You are a gentleman of birth and breeding,' said he,

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'and yet you associate yourself with me, whom men call a ne'er-do-well, in a visit to a man to whom you are a stranger—and all out of curiosity!'

CUMNOR PLACE AND AVENUE

'But if you want my confidence, you must first give me yours,' said Tressilian.

'Oh, if that is all,' said the other, 'my motives are on the surface. I want to see this mysterious lady, to find out Tony Foster's secret, and to make profit out of him. I already know more about him than I did last night.'

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By this time, after passing through a neglected orchard, they had reached the door of the mansion, at which Lambourne boldly knocked, without waiting to hear what confidence Tressilian might give him in return for his own. An aged, sour-faced servant opened a small hole in the door, protected by iron bars, and asked what they wanted.

'To speak with Master Foster instantly on important business of state,' was Lambourne's ready reply.

In a short time the servant returned and opened the door. They passed through an archway and across a court surrounded by buildings, to another door, which the servant also unlocked, and entered a small, stone-paved room, where they waited for some time till Anthony Foster appeared.

Foster was a man of medium height, built strongly, but so clumsily that he seemed almost deformed. His dark hair escaped from under a fur cap, and hung over his rugged forehead. His keen dark eyes, deeply set beneath shaggy eyebrows, were usually bent upon the ground, but were occasionally raised to glance swiftly at those with whom he talked. These eyes, together with ugly, irregular features, made up a countenance that one could not easily forget. He was clothed in a leather coat, like those worn by the better sort of country folk, held in by a belt in which were stuck on the right side a long knife and on the other a sword.

'Ha! my dear friend, Tony Foster!' exclaimed Lambourne, seizing Foster's unwilling hand as he advanced slowly into the middle of the room, and shaking it violently; 'have you forgotten your old playfellow, Michael Lambourne?'

'Are you Michael Lambourne?' said Foster, dropping his eyes and withdrawing his hand. 'What do you want here?'

'I expected a better welcome than this from my old friend, Tony Fire-the-Faggot.'

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'Hark, you gallows-bird; you are a gambler and can count chances. What are the chances that I do not throw you out of the window into the ditch?'

'Twenty to one,' said Lambourne coolly; 'I am younger and stronger than you, and a better fighter, though not so cunning.'

Foster paced the room slowly twice, and then suddenly addressed Lambourne in a friendly tone, saying that he had only been testing him. He asked who his companion was, and if he was one of his own kind. Lambourne introduced Tressilian, without naming him, as a gentleman of admirable qualities, but not of the same sort as himself and Foster, though with practice he might become as skilful in their line of business.

'If that is the kind of man he is,' said Foster, 'I will ask you to come with me into another room, honest Mike. Meanwhile, sir, I pray you to remain in this room.'

They left Tressilian, and entered a large room, which had been the library of the Abbot of Abingdon in Queen Mary's reign. The books were still there, but tattered and torn, and flung here and there in disorderly heaps; some of the oaken shelves were broken and dismantled, and everything was covered with dust and cobwebs. Even Lambourne was impressed by the condition of the books, and said he had seen cities where they would have been prized.

'What do I care?' answered Foster; 'they are Popish trash, fit only for scouring pans and such base uses.'

'You have indeed changed coats, Tony Fire-the-Faggot!' said Lambourne in reply.

'Listen to me, friend Mike,' said Foster, scowling; 'forget that name and what it means, unless you wish to put a sudden end to our newly-revived friendship.'

He went on to explain that he had changed his religion, a change which he evidently took very seriously; but finding Lambourne unsympathetic, he changed the subject, and asked him what he had come for.

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'The hope of bettering myself, to be sure,' answered Lambourne. 'You are here well established, it would seem, and men talk of your being under some special protection. Now such protection is not purchased for nothing; you must have services to render for it, and in these I propose to help you. Your patron will need both of us. You have deep cunning and great perseverance, but I am bolder and more ready in action. What do you say? Shall we hunt in couples? I have come here to be busy either with you or against you.'

'Well,' said Foster, 'since you leave me the choice, I will rather be your friend than your enemy. I *can* recommend you to a patron, and you are well qualified for his service; you have boldness and skill, and no scruples of conscience.'

'And what is the name of this nobleman?' said Lambourne.

'Aha! Master Michael,' said Foster, with a grim smile, 'is this all you know about my affairs?'

But at this moment they were interrupted by a scream from the neighbouring apartment, and Foster rushed out of the room, followed by Lambourne.

Tressilian, on being left alone, had remained for some time in deep thought, recalling the events that had led him to the house. Some time before, his betrothed, Amy Robsart, had suddenly disappeared from her father's house, Lidcote Hall, in Devonshire, and without the knowledge of either her father or Tressilian had been secretly married to the Earl of Leicester. Knowing nothing of Leicester's intimacy with Amy, Tressilian had at once jumped to the conclusion that she had been carried off by one Richard Varney, a follower of the earl who had disappeared from the neighbourhood at the same time; and he was now searching for her in the hope of saving her from a husband whom he had reason to look upon as a villain. His anxious thoughts were suddenly inter

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rupted by the entrance of a beautiful and richly-dressed young woman, whom he instantly recognized as Amy Robsart. His first impulse was to conceal his face with the collar of his cloak; but the lady, thinking he was her husband, the earl, whose return she had been anxiously awaiting, ran joyfully towards him and plucked it away. At the unexpected sight of Tressilian she staggered back, turning as pale as death, and in a faltering voice asked why he had intruded into her dwelling uninvited.

'Alas, Amy!' said Tressilian, 'is a prison your dwelling? Your broken-hearted father has sent me to look for you. Here is his letter, written while he blessed the bodily pain which somewhat deadened the agony of his mind.'

'The pain!—is my father ill?' said Amy. 'Go back to him, good Tressilian—tell him I am well and happy—tell him I will obtain permission to see him within twelve hours—tell him that all the grief I have caused him will be forgotten.'

'Permission!—permission to visit your father on his sick-bed!' exclaimed Tressilian impatiently. 'From whom? From the villain who stole you from your father's roof?'

'Do not slander him, Tressilian!' said Amy, thinking that he knew that Leicester was her husband, and spoke of him. 'He is greater and nobler than you. Go, carry my message to my father.'

This answer unfortunately did not satisfy Tressilian.

'Amy,' he cried, 'in the name of your unhappy father, I command you to follow me!' As he spoke he advanced and stretched out his arm as if to lay hold of her, but she shrank back and uttered the scream which brought Foster and Lambourne into the room.

Foster, in a tone between entreaty and command, urged the lady to retire, and abruptly ordered Tressilian to leave the house. This he immediately did, after a brief word of farewell to Amy.

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'Follow that meddling fool, Mike,' said Foster to Lambourne, 'and see him safely off the premises, while I bring this headstrong lady to reason. Draw your sword, man, and after him.'

Meanwhile Tressilian, leaving the house hastily and in great distress of mind, went astray, and instead of follow-

TRESSILIAN'S INTERVIEW WITH AMY ROBSART

ing the way by which he had come, took another, that led him to the other side of the park, where a small door in the wall led into the open country. As he approached it, the door opened and a man entered, muffled in a riding-cloak, and wearing a slouched hat with a drooping feather. Each started with surprise at the sight of the other.

'Varney!' exclaimed Tressilian. 'The scoundrel who carried off Amy Robsart! Draw and defend yourself!'

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Varney did not at once draw his sword, but tried to assure Tressilian by all that was sacred that he had done no injury to Amy Robsart or to those who loved her. Tressilian, however, blindly confident in his own opinion, would listen to nothing, and a fight ensued, in which Varney, finding himself not more skilful than his opponent in the use of the sword, tried to close with him so as to use his own superior strength; but Tressilian, by a wrestling trick which he had learned in his native Cornwall, threw him violently to the ground, and had him at his mercy. At this moment, however, his arm was seized by Michael Lambourne, who, guided by the clashing of swords, had come up just in time to save Varney's life.

Tressilian shook himself free, and in his rage at the interruption would have turned on Lambourne, had he not observed that Varney had risen and regained his weapon. Perceiving that it would be madness to fight against such odds, he turned and departed through the door, after throwing a couple of gold coins to Lambourne, saying, 'There, you rascal, is your morning's wage. You shall not say you have been my guide for nothing.'

Varney was too severely shaken by his fall to follow. Learning from Lambourne that he was a friend of Foster's, he said to him:

'Here is money for you. Follow that fellow and see where he goes; and bring me word to the mansion here. Be cautious and silent!'

He then walked slowly away, and Lambourne stayed only to pick up the gold which his late companion had flung to him, muttering to himself, 'I spoke of Eldorado to those stupid fellows at the inn. There's no Eldorado for men of my sort like merry old England.'

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CHAPTER III

VARNEY AT CUMNOR PLACE

ANTHONY FOSTER was still disputing with his fair guest, who treated with scorn every entreaty that she should retire to her apartment, when a whistle was heard at the entrance-door of the mansion.

'Now we are fairly undone,' said Foster; 'that is your lord's signal, and I cannot think what to say about the disorder of the household.'

'My lord! my dear lord!' exclaimed the lady, hastening towards the door; and her disappointment was great to see that it was only Varney, who, however, restored her joy by announcing that her lord would arrive that night. He then handed her a small parcel wrapt in scarlet silk. With eager speed the lady hastened to undo the silken string, but the knot would not yield to her impatience. So she called for her attendant Janet, daughter of Anthony Foster, a simply-attired, pretty maiden, whose nimble fingers soon unloosed it. A necklace of beautiful pearls and a perfumed letter were produced from the packet. The lady handed the first, after a slight glance, to Janet, while she seized the second and devoured its contents.

Janet gazed at the necklace in admiration, and called the attention of her mistress to the beauty and the value of the pearls; but the lady said:

'Each word in this dear paper is worth the whole string, my girl. But come to my dressing-room; my lord is coming here to-night. He bids me show you favour, Master Varney, and so I invite you to dinner, and you too, Master Foster. Give orders for all preparations to be made for my lord's arrival.'

With these words she left the apartment.

After her departure Varney turned to Foster and

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demanded an explanation of Tressilian's presence at Cumnor Place.

'Tressilian!' answered Foster; 'I never heard his name'

'Why, villain, he was the very man whom old Sir Hugh Robsart intended his daughter Amy to marry, and the impetuous fool has come here to fetch back the fair runaway. Luckily he does not know that the earl is her husband, and thinks he has only me to deal with. But how on earth did he come here?'

'With Mike Lambourne, if you must know,' said Foster.

'And who is Mike Lambourne?' demanded Varney. 'Have you turned the house into an inn, to invite every passer-by to see what you should keep secret?'

'Did you not instruct me to seek out some one with a good sword and an unscrupulous conscience? This tall fellow Lambourne is the very knave you want. He came here in his impudence to claim old acquaintance with me, bringing this Tressilian with him; and, to speak the truth, Tressilian obtained an interview with our mistress while I was talking apart with Lambourne.'

Much alarmed by this news, Varney questioned Foster closely as to what had happened at the interview, but the latter could only tell him of the lady's scream, and that he had heard from Janet that she had been told of her father's illness.

'That is a hint that I can make use of to Tressilian's disadvantage,' said Varney. 'But the country must be rid of the fellow.' He told Foster of his fight with Tressilian, saying that he would have killed him had his foot not slipped, and he suggested that if Tressilian should come prowling about the house again Foster might welcome him with cold steel or hot lead. Foster's conscience was not at all offended by this invitation to do murder, but he asked what wages he should have for such work, hinting that at present he was only the tenant of Cumnor Place, living

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there at Varney's pleasure, and would like to become the owner. Varney replied that this might happen, but it would be for greater services than merely keeping the doors and windows shut upon the fair wife whom his lord the earl wished to keep secret for a time. He recounted the value of the house and the estate, and having thus aroused Foster's greed, he departed.

When they met again at noon, at the midday meal, their talk turned to the subject of their own fortunes, which Varney said must be founded on the goodwill of the lady.

'We are building on sand then,' said Foster; 'for supposing she goes off to court in all her lord's dignity and authority, how will she look back on me, who am her jailer, as it were?'

'Do not fear,' said Varney; 'I will show her that it was all good service, both to my lord and to her. She will remember those who helped her to greatness.' And when Foster said doubtfully that she seemed to look on Varney with an unfriendly eye, he went on: 'You mistake her utterly, Foster. She is bound to me as the means of gratifying both her love and her ambition. Who took the obscure Amy Robsart—the daughter of a penniless old knight—from her lowly fate and gave her the prospect of the brightest fortune in England? Who arranged her secret meetings with the earl? Who carried their letters? Who planned her escape, and finally her marriage? It was I.'

'Still, she has a quarrel with you,' said Foster; 'she ascribes the secrecy in which she is kept, while she longs to shine as a countess among countesses, to the advice you give my lord, and to my strictness. So she loves us both as a sentenced man loves his judge and his jailer.'

'She must love us better before she leaves this place,' said Varney. And here they were interrupted by a knock at the gate, which proved to be the announcement of the

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arrival of Lambourne, who was shown by Foster into the old library.

Varney, who was not nearly so confident of his influence over the countess as he had professed to Foster, sat for some time anxiously meditating his course of action, before he went to receive Lambourne's report about Tressilian. He was sure that his lord's interest—and therefore his own—demanded the concealment of this obscure marriage; he had not helped this lady to her present dignity merely to ruin his own ambitions; he must get her into his power, but how? He could only in the meantime resolve to watch for the slightest opportunity that might offer itself.

In the evening the Countess Amy sat in a richly furnished apartment on the western side of the mansion. The apartment was one of four which formed one side of the quadrangle, and which had been converted into the appearance of a royal palace with the most exquisite and costly decorations and furniture. This work had been performed by skilled workmen sent secretly from London, and had been kept most carefully from the knowledge of the neighbourhood; it had just been finished, and this evening the countess had entered the apartments for the first time. She flitted from room to room, all brilliantly illuminated, though the light was carefully screened from outside view by heavy curtains and closed shutters, admiring each new proof of her bridegroom's taste, and prizing them less for their beauty than as evidences of his love. Her maid, Janet, had followed her with equal curiosity but less eager joy, and, being a Puritan, had reminded her that thanks were due to God who had given her a good husband. The mistress's attention, however, was more struck by Janet's remark that, if she ran about from room to room so wildly, she would disarrange her hair, upon which the maid had been spending so much time and skill. So now she was reclining upon a heap of

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cushions in the drawing-room, while Janet put her curls in order.

You might have searched sea and land without finding half so lovely a woman as the countess. The wreath of diamonds which mingled with her dark hair was not so bright as her hazel eyes, with their long, light brown eyelashes. Her present excitement spread a glow over her fine features, and the pearls of her necklace were not so pure as her milk-white teeth.

'Enough, Janet,' she said at last. 'I must see your father before my lord arrives, and also Master Varney, whom my lord esteems highly—but I could tell something of him that would lose him favour.'

Janet ventured to warn her mistress not to do anything against Varney, saying that her father had told her that he would rather meet a hungry wolf than thwart him, and had warned her to have nothing to do with him.

'Your father advised you well, girl,' replied the lady. 'It is a pity that his face and manner are not more pleasant, for I think he means well.'

Janet besought her mistress to believe that her father's plain face and blunt manner concealed a kind heart, and the countess promised to do all she could to believe in him for Janet's sake, though he had one of those faces which men tremble to look at. Then she sent her to call Foster and Varney.

In a few minutes Varney entered the drawing-room with the graceful ease of a courtier, and Foster plodded clumsily after him. The countess greeted the former with apparent cordiality, and when the latter apologized for any discomfort which his obedience to his lord's commands might have caused her, she readily excused his strictness on account of his fidelity. Foster soon took his leave, saying he must see that all was in order for the earl's arrival, and would have taken Janet with him so as to leave Varney alone with the countess, but the latter

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ordered her to stay. Janet therefore went to the other end of the room, out of earshot, and busied herself with embroidery work, while the other two entered into conversation.

Varney intimated to the countess that he wished to speak of her husband. Though the subject was welcome to her, she urged him to be brief, for she expected the earl's arrival soon. Varney therefore plunged into what he really wanted to speak about.

'Madam,' said he, 'you have to-day seen Tressilian. Will not your lord be disturbed when he hears of it?'

'Why should that disturb him? To me alone the visit was painful, for he brought news of my good father's illness.'

'His illness, madam!' answered Varney. 'It must have been sudden then, for a messenger I sent found him in the hunting-field. I trust Tressilian has invented the news. He has reasons, as you know, for disturbing your happiness.'

'You do him injustice,' replied the countess with animation. 'Except my honourable lord, I do not know a man to whom falsehood is more odious than to Tressilian. I have done him wrong, as no one knows better than you; and I must do his character justice. Nothing in the world would bribe him from the way of truth and honour. Yet perhaps his anxiety on my account may have led him to exaggerate my father's illness.'

'He certainly concealed the truth,' said Varney. 'And, after all, a little concealment is often prudent and necessary. Take your own case, madam. A more careful lady would have avoided praising a discarded suitor, as you have done, before me, the dependant and confidant of her husband.'

'And why', said the countess impatiently, 'should I not do justice to Tressilian before my husband himself—before the whole world?'

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'Your ladyship will do as you please, but I think it would be well to spare your husband the disquiet, and Tressilian the danger that will ensue.'

'I cannot think so without believing my lord to be jealous,' answered the countess.

'Far be it from me to say that he is,' replied Varney; 'but look around you, noble lady, and observe how closely you are guarded from the public gaze.'

'What is the use of all this talk, Master Varney? You would have me believe that my lord is jealous. Suppose it is true; the best cure is to tell him the truth always. I will tell the whole matter to my lord, and will so plead for poor Tressilian that his generous heart will seek to help rather than punish him.'

'Your judgement, madam,' said Varney, 'is better than mine, and I would only advise that before taking this step you should mention Tressilian's name to my lord, and note how he bears it. Foster does not know Tressilian, and I can prevent my lord from hearing it through him.'

'Master Varney, let us drop this subject,' said the countess, and the next moment she jumped up in delight, exclaiming, 'He comes!' as the sound of horses fell upon her ears.

Varney, afraid that he had offended her, hastened to beseech that what he called his faithful advice should not be turned to his ruin; but the countess in her excitement could not listen to him, and in a few moments the door flew open, and a man of majestic appearance, wearing a long dark riding-cloak, entered the apartment.

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CHAPTER IV

THE EARL'S VISIT

VARNEY discreetly withdrew from the room, as the Earl of Leicester advanced and received the warm welcome of his countess. As she unfastened his cloak, she asked if he had kept his promise to come this time clad as a great earl.

'You are like the rest of the world, Amy,' said he playfully; 'the jewels and silk are more to them than the man they adorn.' And he led her towards a chair of state.

'No,' said she, 'do not think I can love you better in glorious clothes than I loved the man in simple dress who won my heart in the woods of Devon. But I will sit here on this footstool at your feet, and learn for the first time how a prince is dressed.'

With childish wonder, she examined and admired him from head to foot, while he explained the meaning of the various decorations that he wore: this was the star of the Order of the Garter, which he had received at the same time as three other nobles, the Duke of Norfolk, the Marquis of Northampton, and the Earl of Rutland; this collar was the badge of the noble Order of the Golden Fleece, and carried with it high privileges, for even the King of Spain, who was the head of the Order, could not sit in judgement on a knight of the Golden Fleece except with the consent of the Great Assembly of the Order; that other was the collar of the Order of St. Andrew, and was bestowed upon him when it had been thought that Mary, Queen of Scots, might marry an English nobleman.

'And now, loveliest,' said he, as she paused in her inspection of the jewels, 'your wish is satisfied, as far as could be done within the narrow limits of riding-dress.'

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'The satisfaction of one wish', she answered, 'has, as usual, given rise to another. I now wish to see my earl's princely halls, and to see him enter them in plain costume.'

The earl replied that he could gratify her wish the next day, and she had to explain that she did not mean the secret splendour that had been created in Cumnor Place, but that she wished to take her place as the acknowledged wife of England's noblest earl, in his own castle.

'Yes, Amy, my love, one day this shall happen; and, believe me, you cannot wish for that day more fondly than I.'

'But why can it not be now?' said the countess. 'Mighty and favoured as you are, who or what should prevent your attaining your wish?'

The earl's brow was clouded. He told her that these were matters she could not understand; that to declare his marriage now would be to work his own ruin at court; and he besought her to believe that he would eventually do her justice. Then, to take her thoughts, and his own, away from this painful subject, he asked whether all was managed to her liking at Cumnor Place. Foster, he said, seemed a sullen fellow, but he should repent it if Amy had anything to complain of in his conduct.

'I have nothing to complain of,' said the countess, 'if he is faithfully doing his duty to you. His daughter Janet is the kindest and best companion of my solitude.'

The earl at once called up Janet, who was still busy at the other end of the room, and offered her a valuable ring as a token of his approval; but Janet refused it, saying it was against the principles of her religion to wear such things. However, she accepted instead five gold pieces, hoping to find a good use for them; and the earl dismissed her with an order to hasten the supper.

The countess would then have opened the subject of her father and Tressilian, and said, 'I have a boon to beg and a secret to tell, my dear lord.' But the earl, who was

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tired and hungry after his long ride, asked her to keep them till the next morning, and led her into the dining-room.

There they were received with the deepest bows by Varney and Foster, who were present in accordance with the countess's invitation, and sat down to supper. At the meal Varney did his utmost by his witty and pleasant conversation to keep the earl in good humour and to make a favourable impression on the countess; but Foster, being out of his element, said nothing. After supper they all retired for the night.

Next morning Varney, who was the earl's master of horse and had been his page at an earlier stage of his career, appeared in the earl's room to act as body-servant and help him to dress. He found him in a mood that inclined him to abandon all his ambitious and dangerous schemes for power and favour at court and to retire to a quiet life in the country.

'What can further service and higher favour give me,' he said, 'beyond the rank and estate I have already? What brought my father to the block, but that he could not bound his wishes within right and reason?'

Varney, however, easily drove him out of this mood by describing the consequences of such retirement: how he, the prime favourite of the Queen of England, who had ruled the army and controlled the parliament, would become a rural baron, spending his time in hunting, hawking, and drinking ale with country squires, while his rival, Sussex, would govern England.

'The queen's health fails,' he concluded: 'the succession is to be settled; and a more splendid road is opened to ambition than was ever dreamed of.'

'No more of this, Varney,' interrupted the earl. 'I must subdue my wishes to the public need. Order out the horses. I will take leave of my lady, and be ready.' So saying, he left Varney, and entered his wife's room.

AMY ROBSART

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'I am glad he is gone,' thought Varney, 'or I should have laughed in his face! He may tire of his new toy, of this pretty wife, but he shall not tire of his old toy, ambition; for as he climbs the hill he drags me with him. She may be countess indeed, but she had better not thwart my purposes. I order his horses now, but a time may come when I shall have a master of horse of my own. Others have risen, and why not I? I know my way as well as any of them.'

Meanwhile the earl was bidding farewell to the countess. 'The sun is rising,' said he, intending to cut short the interview; 'I dare not stay. By now I should have been ten miles away.'

'But will you not grant my request?' said the countess. 'I do not ask again to be acknowledged as your wife, my lord, but let me share the secret with my dear father. Let me end his misery on my account. They say he is ill, the good old man.'

'Who say?' asked the earl, hastily. 'Did not Varney tell you that your father was in his usual health? Be content, Amy. We have told your father all we dare at present. Besides, that fellow Tressilian haunts the old knight's house, and would know whatever was told there.'

'I do not think so,' the countess replied. 'My father is too honourable to betray a secret; and as for Tressilian, I will wager the coronet that I am to share with you one day that he would not return injury for the injury I have done him.'

'I will not trust him, Amy,' said the earl. 'He is in league with Sussex, my rival at court, and would use his knowledge to ruin me.'

The countess tried in vain to move him to a better opinion of Tressilian. At last she said, 'You seem offended at my speaking of him. What would you say if I had actually seen him?'

'If you had,' said the earl, darkly, 'you had better keep it secret. I shall crush any man who dares to thrust himself into my affairs.'

At these words the countess turned pale, and said no more of Tressilian. Soon afterwards the earl rode away, disguised in the livery of a servant and waving farewells to the countess, who watched his departure from a window, while Varney stayed behind for a few minutes' talk with Foster.

'Here is a purse of gold pieces for you, Anthony,' said he. 'Add them to what the earl gave to Janet last night.'

'What!' said Foster hastily; 'did he give her gold? She shall return it. Gold is a temptation of the devil, and I shall keep one of my family at least from his clutches.'

'Make her give it up to your own keeping,' said Varney, with a laugh. 'But a word in your ear: say nothing to any one of Tressilian's visit.'

'And for what reason, I pray you?' said Foster, suspiciously.

'Dull fool!' replied Varney. 'The earl dotes on this woman, and would forsake the court for her; and if he thought she were not safe in this retirement, he would do so, to watch over her himself; and then, Tony, your occupation would be ended. A word is enough to the wise. Farewell.'

'Would that your neck were broken,' muttered Foster, as Varney departed. 'But Janet must give me that gold. It shall be spent in some way in God's service. No evil shall breathe on Janet—she shall remain pure as a blessed spirit, if it were only to pray to God for her father; for I need her prayers.'

Varney overtook the earl, but immediately, with his permission, left him to pay a visit to Lambourne. Arriving at the 'Black Bear' Inn, he became very angry on hearing that Tressilian had disappeared in the night. Lambourne

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protested that he had watched most carefully, and that not even the ostler knew when or whither Tressilian had ridden away. Inquiries from the landlord supported Lambourne's statement, so Varney pursued his original purpose and asked Lambourne if he were inclined to enter a nobleman's service. He replied that he was, and that he supposed that the qualities wanted were a quick eye, a close mouth, a ready and bold hand, a sharp wit, and a blunt conscience, for such qualities he possessed.

'Can you be faithful?' asked Varney.

'Yes,' was the reply, 'provided I am well paid; not otherwise.'

'And can you add to your other virtues the art of seeming religious when occasion demands it?'

'It would cost me nothing to say yes,' answered Lambourne; 'but if you want a hypocrite like Anthony Foster, I am not the man.'

'Well, if you have not hypocrisy, have you a horse? If so, saddle him and follow me. Leave your clothes and baggage with the landlord. And if you do not better yourself, it will be your own fault.'

Lambourne quickly took leave of his uncle, who, half jestingly, charged him to get hanged, if he must, as far from Cumnor as possible. And, mounting his horse, he rode off with Varney.

As they rode along, Lambourne explained more fully the terms on which he accepted service. If he was to have a quick eye for his patron's interests, the latter must have a dull one for his faults; and if he and the law should quarrel, he would expect his patron's protection; as for wages, he would be content to depend more on what he could pick up than on regular pay. Varney assured him that he would be satisfied, and told him that though he was to belong to a great nobleman's household, he was to be under the orders of the master of horse, Varney himself.

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Before nightfall they had reached their master's residence and Lambourne was introduced into the household of the Earl of Leicester.

CHAPTER V

DICKIE SLUDGE IS INTRODUCED

After Tressilian's fight with Varney, the former returned to Giles Gosling's inn, where he demanded pen, ink, and paper, and shut himself up in his room. In the evening he again appeared in the public room, and there met Lambourne, upon whom he turned his back, although the man attempted to renew acquaintance with him. Lambourne was inclined at first to bully, but seeing that Tressilian was in no way impressed by his bluster, he contented himself with watching him for the rest of the evening.

That night, after Tressilian had retired to rest, he was surprised by a visit from Giles Gosling. Honest Giles was alarmed at the turn things were taking. He suspected from Tressilian's manner and appearance on his return that he had been fighting; he had observed his nephew's close watch on Tressilian, and the changed relations between the two; and he feared that, if Lambourne and Foster had united against his guest, some serious harm might befall him; so he had come to give him warning.

Tressilian told Giles that he cared nothing for these two, except as agents of a more powerful villain than themselves.

'You mean Richard Varney!' said the host, more alarmed than ever; 'the protector and patron of Anthony Foster. It is he who got the grant of Cumnor Place from the Earl of Leicester. Men say that he has great influence with the earl, and fear almost to mention his name. Last night you heard them say whatever they pleased about

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Tony Foster, but not a word of Richard Varney, though they judge that he is at the bottom of the mystery about the lady at Cumnor Place. But perhaps you know more of that matter than I do. Take care of yourself; you have a powerful enemy.'

Tressilian resolved to take the honest landlord into his confidence.

'I do know more about that unfortunate lady than you, my friend,' said he, 'and I will tell you the whole history, and ask your advice.'

The landlord humbly doubted whether he was worthy to be the confidant and adviser of a gentleman of Tressilian's position, but assured him that he would at least not abuse his confidence. Though he had the curiosity of an innkeeper, he had learned caution.

So Tressilian related to him the story of the friendship that had existed between his own family and that of Sir Hugh Robsart since the time of his grandfather, who had been made prisoner at a battle in one of the civil wars, by Sir Hugh's father, Sir Roger Robsart. By Sir Roger's kind protection his life was saved from the vengeance of the king, though he lost most of his property. The friendship had been particularly strong between Tressilian's father and Sir Hugh, who had inherited Sir Roger's generous and hospitable disposition. At his father's death Tressilian had been treated as a son by the good Sir Hugh, and had been his constant companion. He had fallen in love with the exquisite beauty of Amy, Sir Hugh's only child, but though her father approved of his suit, she had felt for him no warmer feeling than esteem, and it was only to please her father, and on condition that the marriage should not take place for a year, that she had at last consented to be betrothed to him.

Then Varney had appeared, and though Amy had at first seemed to be indifferent to him, and later even to dislike him, she had afterwards become more friendly, and many

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circumstances could now be remembered which suggested that she might have had secret understandings with him. Finally she vanished from her father's house, and Varney vanished also.

'This day,' Tressilian concluded, 'I found her living as Varney's wife in Cumnor Place. I followed her with the hope of persuading her to return to her broken-hearted father, and, in spite of my failure, I will try again to-morrow.'

Giles Gosling advised him to give up the thought.

'If the lady has of her own accord refused to listen to you,' said he, 'you have no right, no legal authority, to intrude yourself upon her.'

Tressilian recognized the force of this argument.

'I will appeal,' said he, 'to the Earl of Leicester against the infamous conduct of his favourite. Or I will appeal to the queen herself and prove that the lady was carried off and married against her will and without her father's consent.'

Giles approved of the appeal to the stronger power, and pointed out that it would be necessary to get a petition drawn up in Sir Hugh Robsart's name, and also to obtain the support of friends at court. Tressilian accepted this advice, and said he would leave early in the morning; but the landlord, who had already saddled his guest's horse with his own hands, insisted that for his safety he must go at once.

While his guest was preparing for departure, Giles ventured to say, 'I wonder why you persist in playing the champion of a woman who does not want you.'

'I have no desire that she should ever think of me again,' said Tressilian. 'If I could but see her restored to her father, I should depart, perhaps to the new colony of Virginia.'

Giles shook his head, saying, 'It would be better to forget all about her.' But at Tressilian's request he promised, out of pity for the good old knight who had lost his daughter, to aid as far as he could by keeping a watch on

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all the doings at Cumnor Place, and to communicate them only to such person as should bring Tressilian's ring as a token. So having received the payment of his bill, with a generous allowance for the servants of the inn, he led his guest through intricate passages to a side door, and dismissed him to his solitary journey.

Instead of travelling by the highway, Tressilian followed a route along by-ways and lanes, which would have led him to the high road to Marlborough had he remembered all Giles Gosling's directions. But his ignorance of the country, the darkness of the night, and his sad and perplexing thoughts, caused him to miss the way. His horse, too, had lost a shoe, and in the early morning he looked around for a smith's workshop. He at last espied a small hamlet, and, going up to the most respectable cottage it contained, he asked an old dame, who was sweeping the threshold, if there was a smith in the neighbourhood who could shoe his horse.

'Master Erasmus Holiday!' exclaimed the old woman, without giving a direct reply, 'Come out here. Here is a man who wants Wayland Smith—his horse has lost a shoe.'

After a few more calls, there came out one who was evidently a schoolmaster, grumbling, in language full of Latin phrases, at being disturbed in his morning studies. His long stooping figure was surmounted by a head thatched with lank hair, somewhat inclined to grey. He was clothed in a black cassock gathered at the waist by a belt, in which was stuck on one side his birch, and on the other a leathern pen-and-ink case. Seeing that Tressilian was a gentleman, the schoolmaster greeted him with a Latin salutation, to which Tressilian managed to reply in the same tongue that though he was not entirely ignorant of Latin, he preferred to speak in the vernacular. This evidence of learning at once interested the schoolmaster in the visitor, and with long speeches full of Latin quotations that tried Tressilian's patience, he invited him to enter and partake of his humble

breakfast, and to put up his horse in the cow-house to share with the cow its plentiful supply of hay: he added that Gammer Sludge (as he called the old dame), who was indebted to him for the pains he had bestowed on the teaching and correction of her hopeful son, Dickie, would not grudge a breakfast for both horse and man.

Tressilian, considering the state of his horse, and seeing no quicker way to find a smith than by humouring the schoolmaster, accepted the invitation and entered the cottage. At breakfast he was entertained by an account, in the same learned style, of the schoolmaster's birth and history, which it is not necessary to set down here. Suffice it to say that he was the son of a poor washerwoman at Oxford, who had given him the name of Erasmus because she had washed the linen of the great scholar of that name during his stay at the University, hoping that one day her son too might become a great scholar; and that he was skilled in the art of arranging pageants, May-day festivities, and other holiday delights, an art which had brought him to the notice of honourable persons and especially of the noble Earl of Leicester.

The schoolmaster's discourse went on long after breakfast was over, and at last Tressilian, growing impatient, reminded him that he wanted his horse shod. But he would not be hastened, and Tressilian's interruption only started him on another long-winded account, of which the substance was as follows.

Some two or three years before, there had come to that region one who called himself Doctor Demetrius Doboobie, who practised the trade of a quack doctor, pretending to have knowledge of a medicine for all human ills, and of the art of converting the baser metals into silver and gold. He won great fame in the neighbourhood, but suddenly disappeared. He had a servant who used to help him with his drugs and his furnaces and in cheating his patients, and when the doctor disappeared, this servant, Wayland

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by. name, continued his dangerous trade; but with little success. He could shoe horses, however, better than any other smith in England.

At this point the old dame, who had been listening as if enraptured with the fine words of the learned master, broke in with the remark, 'He takes no money for his work, and that is a sure sign that he deals with Satan. No good Christian would ever refuse the wages of his labour.' This was confirmed by the schoolmaster, who added that the smith showed himself to no one.

Tressilian now asked the way to this mysterious smith's abode. The old woman hastened to ask Master Holiday to show it, but he preferred to send his pupil, Dickie Sludge. This proposal caused great anxiety to his mother, who said she would not let him go on such a dangerous errand. The master, however, assured her that Dickie need only point to the place from a distance, and, besides, he could come to no harm, as he had read that morning, fasting, a chapter from the Bible. But the old woman was more assured by the thought that she had sewn a sprig of witch's elm in the neck of Dickie's jacket. At the call of his master the boy entered; a queer, ill-made urchin, too small for his age, with red hair, a freckled face, a snub nose, and two grey eyes with a slight squint that gave him a droll look. Dickie pretended at first great unwillingness to go, much to the delight of his mother, who told the schoolmaster that she did not feed and clothe him that he might send her darling on such an errand. At last Tressilian promised him money for his services as guide. Dickie was no longer reluctant, but he had still to elude his mother.

'Guide you to Wayland Smith's!' he exclaimed, with a knowing look to Tressilian. 'Why, the devil might fly off with me as that kite is flying off with the chicken.'

The old woman forgot everything else as she ran out to save the chicken, while Dickie, having thus got rid of his mother, ran off, telling Tressilian to mount his horse and

come on. The master, in fear of the old woman's wrath, would have stopped him if he could, but the boy was much too nimble. Tressilian, having forced on the learned gentleman payment for his entertainment, followed his guide, and had not gone far when he heard behind him the screams of the old woman's cracked voice, mixed with the Latin protestations of Master Erasmus Holiday.

CHAPTER VI

WAYLAND SMITH

'HAVE we far to go, my pretty lad?' said Tressilian to his guide.

'What did you call me?' replied the boy, with a sharp look. 'My mother calls me pretty because she is half blind by age and wholly blind by love, and the poor schoolmaster does it to win her favour; but why you do so is best known to yourself. My playfellows call me Flibbertigibbet; but I would rather have my ugly face than their empty heads.'

Tressilian soon saw that his guide was a sharp lad, and learned by further questioning that he was also ambitious. He intended to make his way to court, and would have left the country long before, but Master Holiday, who, he shrewdly remarked, was not such a fool as he looked, had promised to give him a part in the next pageant that he was to arrange, which was to take place soon at some great castle in the north.

'Here we are at Wayland Smith's,' at last said the boy, though Tressilian could see nothing but a bare moor with a circle of great stones in the middle. 'You must tie your horse to the upright stone with the ring in it, lay your money on that other flat stone, whistle three times, walk out of the circle and sit down on the west side of that

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clump of bushes, taking care that you look neither to the right nor to the left so long as the hammer clinks; and whenever it ceases, say your prayers for the space in which you could count a hundred—or count a hundred, which will do as well—and you will find your money gone and your horse shod.'

WAYLAND SMITH'S CAVE

'My money gone, certainly!' said Tressilian, and thinking the boy wanted to play a trick on him, would have laid hold of him; but he ran away, and with great ease kept just out of reach of his pursuer, as if to encourage him to continue the chase. Tressilian at last stood still for very weariness, and the boy clapped his hands and twisted his features into an expression of laughter and derision that provoked both amusement and annoyance. The man would then have mounted his horse to pursue

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him, but the boy shouted that this was useless, as he could easily take refuge in a bog close at hand, where no horse could follow; so Tressilian gave in and said:

'Come here, you mischievous rogue! On my word as a gentleman I will do you no harm.'

The boy accepted his word with the utmost confidence, and came near; and when he was told to play no tricks he assured Tressilian that he must do exactly as he had already been told. Though only half convinced, Tressilian tied his horse to the ring in the stone, and laid down some money, and when Dickie Sludge had whistled shrilly three times, allowed himself to be led behind the bushes. There he sat down as directed, but, as it occurred to him that this might be a trick to steal his horse, he kept hold of the boy's collar.

To his surprise he soon heard the clink of a hammer and could not avoid an involuntary start, at which, he saw, the boy grinned with amused delight. He sat still till the hammer ceased, and then, instead of waiting as his guide had directed, he rushed out, sword in hand, and found himself face to face with a man fantastically attired in a bear-skin, with a cap of the same that almost hid his sooty features.

The smith seemed inclined to attack him with his hammer in spite of Tressilian's sword, but the boy shouted:

'Wayland, don't touch him or you will come to grief! He is a true gentleman, and a bold one.'

'So you have betrayed me, Flibbertigibbet?' said the smith. 'It shall be the worse for you!'

'You are in no danger from me,' said Tressilian, 'if you tell me the meaning of this practice.'

'I think, worshipful sir,' answered the smith, 'that when a poor man does his day's job he may be permitted to work it out after his own fashion. Your horse is shod; why trouble yourself further than to mount and pursue your journey?'

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'No, my friend,' replied Tressilian; 'every man has the right to take the mask from a cheat; and your mode of living raises suspicions that you are one.'

'If you are so determined, sir, to find me out,' said the smith, 'I cannot save myself except by force. And I would be unwilling to use that towards you, as I believe you are a worthy gentleman who would rather help than harm a poor man.'

He then invited Tressilian to come into his den, and going towards a trapdoor concealed among some gorse-bushes, he raised it and descended. Tressilian at first hesitated to follow, lest it might be a den of thieves, but seeing the boy watching him with a sneer on his face, he went forward and descended, sword in hand, into the earth, while Dickie followed, closing the trapdoor and thus excluding every glimmer of daylight. A narrow passage led to a small square vault containing a smith's forge, the fire of which, aided by a lamp hung from the roof by an iron chain, served to show that, besides the usual tools of the smith's trade, the vault contained stoves, tubes of glass, and all the instruments which men used in attempts to turn the baser metals into gold.

After giving a glance around him, Tressilian asked the smith who he was. The smith in reply asked him if he remembered a travelling juggler who once came to a certain Hall in Devonshire and exhibited his skill before a worshipful knight and a goodly company; and how, amongst these, was a fair maiden who had turned pale at the wonders shown, and to whom, to calm her fears, he, Tressilian, had pointed out how the tricks were done. He went on to speak of her great beauty; but Tressilian's face showed that painful memories had been awakened, and he said:

'Silence, I command you, silence. I well remember the night you speak of—one of the few happy evenings my life has known. Not a word more about her.' And after a few moments he added, 'I think you were in those days a jovial

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fellow, who could keep a company merry with song and tale and fiddle as well as with juggling tricks—why do I find you plying a laborious trade in such strange surroundings ? '

The smith offered to tell his tale, and when Tressilian consented to stay and hear it, he first went out to see to the comfort of the horse, and then, returning, told the following story.

He had been bred a blacksmith, and knew his art as well as any one ; but, tired of wielding the hammer, he had apprenticed himself to a celebrated juggler and served him for six years until he became master of his new trade, as, he said, Tressilian could testify. Not long after performing at Sir Hugh Robsart's in Devonshire he had taken to the stage, but his acting had proved so unsuccessful that he had often been pelted by the audience with rotten apples. Running away from the theatre, he had next become half-partner, half-servant to a man who practised as a physician. He had learned something about drugs while training as a blacksmith, and had used that knowledge for the benefit of his new master's patients, on the principle that what was good for a horse could not be bad for a man ; but his master had dealt in more dangerous concerns, reading the stars, telling fortunes, and searching for the philosopher's stone, a discovery to which he believed he had made some approach, and upon which he began to spend, cheating himself, all the money he had gained by cheating others. He built himself a secret laboratory, in which he used to seclude himself, gaining the reputation of being engaged in the pursuit of mystic science and in intercourse with the invisible world. This brought him secret visits from men too powerful to be named, who came for purposes too dangerous to be mentioned.

At last his master (who was no other than the Doctor Doboobie described by Master Holiday) disappeared ; and after a time Wayland sought him in his laboratory, which was the very den in which they were then sitting, and

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found a letter from the learned doctor saying they would never meet again, and bequeathing all the chemical apparatus to him with the advice to continue the search for the philosopher's stone. Looking carefully about he found a small barrel of gunpowder hidden beneath a furnace, so that, had he kindled a fire to do as the doctor had advised, the den would have been converted into his grave. After this, he had stayed on, and with the help of his friend Flibbertigibbet, as he called Dickie Sludge, he had turned to his present practices to make a living. He was now only waiting for an opportunity to return to a more honest mode of life, lest he should be imprisoned as a wizard.

When the story was finished, Tressilian asked Wayland if he knew the roads in that region, and on learning that he did, and that he had an excellent horse, which was the best thing his late master had left to him, offered to engage him as a guide and to give him employment till his pranks should be forgotten. Wayland eagerly accepted the proposal, and in a short time he changed his dress, trimmed his hair and beard, and led the way out of the cavern. He carefully closed and covered up the trap-door, thinking that the place might again serve him in time of need. He bade farewell to Dickie Sludge, the only thing in the place that he regretted to leave, but Dickie said that they would probably meet again at the coming revels for which Master Holiday was preparing a pageant, and ran off, promising to give them a surprise before they had gone a mile.

After they had trotted about that distance, Tressilian observed to his companion that his horse seemed much more lively than it was in the morning.

'That is owing to a secret of mine,' said Wayland. 'I mixed him something, with a handful of oats, that will save your worship's heels the trouble of spurring him for six hours at least. I have not studied drugs to no purpose.'

He went on to explain the excellence of his recipe, when suddenly a tremendous explosion, as loud as a thunderclap,

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FLIBBERTIGIBBET TAKING LEAVE OF WAYLAND SMITH AND TRESSILIAN

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was heard behind them. Looking back, they saw, just over the spot they had left so recently, a huge pillar of dark smoke rising high into the clear blue air.

'I was a fool to mention the gunpowder before that imp of mischief, Flibbertigibbet,' said Wayland. 'He has blown up my den. I might have guessed he would long to put so fine an idea into execution. But let us hasten on, for the sound will collect all the villagers to the spot.'

They continued on their journey, towards Devonshire, without further adventure, till they alighted at an inn in the town of Marlborough, where they received an example of the truth of two old proverbs, namely that *Ill news flies fast*, and that *Listeners seldom hear a good tale of themselves.* For they heard the ostler relating how a passing rider had given him the news that the devil had flown away with Wayland Smith in a flash of fire and a pillar of smoke. The ostler and the farmer with whom he was talking in the inn-yard regretted the loss of one who was so skilled in curing the diseases of horses, though they were not sure that he did not get his skill from the devil. Dame Crane, the landlady of the inn, joined in the conversation with the news that the devil had lifted Wayland Smith just in time, for the constable had gone that very morning to arrest him as a wizard.

Warned by what they had overheard, our travellers speedily retired to a private room, and after staying no longer than was necessary to obtain a meal for themselves and refreshment for their horses, they thought it safer to pursue their journey by a forced march as far as Bradford, where they rested for the night.

Next morning they made an early start, and, not to fatigue the reader with unnecessary particulars, they traversed the counties of Wiltshire and Somerset in safety, and about noon on the third day arrived at Sir Hugh Robsart's seat, called Lidcote Hall, on the border of Devonshire.

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CHAPTER VII

EVENTS AT LIDCOTE HALL

THE ancient mansion of Lidcote Hall was a low, venerable building occupying a considerable space of ground, which was surrounded by a deep moat. The approach and drawbridge were defended by an octagonal tower of ancient ivy-covered brickwork, the corners of which were decorated with turrets, various in form and size. One of these turrets was square, and was used as a clock-house, but the clock was not going. Tressilian rode through an archway under the tower and across the drawbridge into the courtyard of the mansion, and called loudly on the servants by name. For some time he was answered only by the echoes and by the howling of the hounds, till at length one Will Badger, the old and favourite attendant of the knight, made his appearance.

He greeted Tressilian warmly, but could give him only a poor account of Sir Hugh, who, though apparently better in body, passed his time in a stupor which was neither sleeping nor waking, but a kind of twilight between the two.

'I let the clock run down,' said Will, 'thinking that missing the bell might rouse him, for you know he was particular in counting the time; but he never said a word about it. I even dared to tread on Bungay's tail, and that at other times would have procured for me a sound scolding, but Sir Hugh noticed the poor dog's whine no more than an owl whooping down the chimney. About a week ago I thought he was better, for he ordered out his horse and hounds, but before the hunt began, he suddenly stared around him like a man that wakes out of a dream, and turned and walked back to the Hall.'

Meanwhile Wayland was handed over to the care of the butler, and Tressilian's arrival announced in the chamber

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of the sick knight. Thither he was soon summoned by Master Mumblazen, a withered, elderly gentleman, whose grey hair was partly concealed by a small, high hat shaped like a cone. He was a distant relative of the Robsart family, poor, but very learned in heraldry and genealogy, and had lived at Lidcote Hall for twenty years.

In a long, low parlour, full of implements and trophies of the chase, with a massive stone chimney, over which hung a sword and a suit of armour, sat Sir Hugh Robsart. He was a man of large size, which had been kept within moderate compass only by violent exercise. As Tressilian, with tearful eyes, approached the father of his betrothed bride, Sir Hugh's intelligence seemed to revive. He sighed heavily, a slight convulsion passed over his features, he opened his arms without saying a word, and folded Tressilian to his bosom.

'There is something left to live for yet,' were his first words, and he burst into a flood of tears.

'I will ask you no questions, Edmund,' he said, as he recovered a little later; 'either you have not found her, or you could not bring her back.'

Tressilian covered his face with his hands and made no reply.

'It is enough. But do not you weep for her, Edmund. I have cause to weep, for she was my daughter; you have cause to rejoice that she did not become your wife, for she proved herself unworthy of your trust.' The poor old man went on to revile Varney, whose grandfather had been relieved by Sir Roger Robsart's generosity when his fortune had been broken at a battle, the name of which Sir Hugh's bewildered brain could not recall till Master Mumblazen came to his aid. He showed Tressilian a lock of her hair, which she had cut off for him, as he had playfully held her by it, the very night she had disappeared. He then made a desperate effort to forget her, saying she was only a woman, and he must bear the loss like a man

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of spirit and wisdom. But the next moment his weary brain wandered once more, and he called on Amy to bring wine for himself and Tressilian.

His friends urged the old man to lay himself to rest, and Tressilian remained by his pillow till he fell asleep. Tressilian then proceeded to consult Sir Hugh's friends, Master Mumblazen and the curate, who also lived with the knight, on the steps he proposed to take on behalf of Amy Robsart. He told them that he had found her at Cumnor Place, and that he was certain that it was Varney who had carried away the unwilling bride. He now proposed to accuse the villain at the very foot of the throne.

The curate suggested that it would be better to apply to the Earl of Leicester in the first place; for, if the earl granted the appeal, Tressilian would save the risk of making a powerful enemy, which he would certainly do if he accused the earl's prime favourite before the queen. But his argument did not alter Tressilian's resolution, and he asked their assistance in persuading Sir Hugh to make him his agent in the matter, for he must speak in Sir Hugh's name and not in his own.

'If it be your object that this unhappy young woman should be taken from Varney and restored to her father,' persisted the curate, 'I repeat that you should apply in the first instance to the Earl of Leicester. He is as absolute in his household as the queen in her kingdom. If he expresses to Varney that such is his pleasure, she will return to her home without so much publicity.'

Tressilian was obliged to admit the wisdom of this advice, and only urged once more that they should assist him to procure the necessary powers from Sir Hugh Robsart. The two readily promised their assistance, and Tressilian left the room.

'Yet I very much doubt,' said the curate to Master Mumblazen, 'whether we can rightly ask Sir Hugh Robsart

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in his present condition to sign a deed deputing his paternal right—— '

'Your reverence need not doubt that,' said Will Badger, who entered at that moment, 'for I will wager my life he will be another man when he next wakes than he has been these thirty days.'

He told them that he had just given Sir Hugh a draught prepared by Wayland Smith, who, he said, was more skilled in horse and dog ailments than any one he had ever seen. The curate, not having the same confidence in the smith's medical skill, was much alarmed and conveyed the news at once to Tressilian, who called Wayland and demanded by what authority he had ventured to administer any medicine to Sir Hugh Robsart.

'Why,' replied Wayland, 'your worship must remember how I told you that I made more progress in Doctor Doboobie's art than he was willing to own. I understood the good knight's case from what Master William Badger told me; and I hope I am able to administer a poor dose of mandragora, which, with the sleep that will follow, is all that Sir Hugh Robsart requires to settle his troubled brain. Why should I harm the poor old man in whom you, my benefactor, are interested ? '

Wayland Smith was right. The patient's sleep was long and healthful, and he awoke with a much clearer intellect than he had shown for some time past; and, though somewhat reluctantly, he signed and handed to Tressilian a warrant of attorney prepared by the curate ; for in those days the clergyman was often the adviser of his flock in legal as well as in religious matters.

Within twenty-four hours of his arrival at Lidcote Hall, Tressilian was ready to depart. Before he left, Master Mumblazen came up to him, and, reminding him that to prosecute a suit at court ready money was indispensable, produced a bag of gold. It contained £300, the savings of twenty years, which he now devoted to the service of

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the patron whose shelter and protection had given him the means of making this little hoard. Tressilian himself was poor, and the revenues of Sir Hugh Robsart were consumed in his hospitable mode of life, so the unexpected gift was most welcome, and was accepted with hearty thanks.

Tressilian was in some doubt whether he should take Wayland Smith with him on this mission to the Earl of Leicester. He appreciated the man's shrewdness and variety of resource, but thought that for his own sake he had better remain in retirement. While he was debating this matter with Wayland, who was eager to accompany him, Will Badger brought him a letter which a servant on horseback had just delivered. Tressilian opened it and found that it came from his great kinsman, the Earl of Sussex, of whom we shall hear more in the next chapter. It read as follows :

'Master Tressilian, our
good Friend and Cousin,

'We are at present so ill at ease, and otherwise in such unhappy circumstances, that we desire to have around us those of our friends on whose loving kindness we can most especially rely ; amongst whom we consider our good Master Tressilian one of the foremost both in good will and good ability. We therefore beg you with your utmost speed to come to our lodging, at Say's Court, near Deptford, where we will discuss with you matters which we would rather not commit to writing. And so we bid you heartily farewell, being your loving kinsman,

'Ratcliffe, Earl of Sussex.'

The messenger was instantly sent for and questioned as to the earl's malady. The doctors, he said, could do nothing, and some of his household suspected foul play—witchcraft or worse. His symptoms were gradual loss of strength, perspiration at night, loss of appetite, and faintness.

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'Together', asked Wayland, 'with a gnawing pain in the stomach and low fever?'

The messenger assented, not without surprise, and Wayland went on:

'I know the cause of the disease, and I know the cure too. My master shall not say I studied in his laboratory for nothing.'

Remembering Wayland's success in Sir Hugh Robsart's case, Tressilian was persuaded that he spoke the truth, and set out at once for London after taking the kindest leave of the family at Lidcote Hall.

Accompanied by the smith, who, dressed in a suit of Tressilian's livery, with a sword by his side, now looked a gay serving-man of thirty or thirty-five years, and by the messenger who had brought the letter from Lord Sussex, Tressilian made a rapid journey, stopping only when it was necessary to take food and rest. In London a brief halt was made, which enabled Wayland, who accompanied his master in a walk through the city, to visit several chemists' shops, at each of which he purchased a different drug. One drug that he asked for could not be supplied; an old chemist informed him that there was none of it in London unless perchance Yoglan the Jew had some.

Wayland, who seemed to have a considerable knowledge of the city, went to Yoglan's shop—a miserable-looking booth in a narrow lane near the Thames. The Jew was much surprised by his demand for the uncommon drug; he would have given some common stuff in its place, and when the trick was instantly detected he declared that he had nothing better, and that if he had he would not sell it without the order of a physician. Wayland gave him a brief answer in some foreign tongue, which made the Jew first stare at him in astonishment as at some dreaded master, and then produce the drug with all the signs of submission and devotion. Wayland took as much as he

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wanted, but the chemist would take no payment from one whom he now believed to be a great personage.

Returning to the inn, Wayland mixed the drugs into the compound he required, and shortly afterwards they set out on the final hour's ride which brought them to the house of Lord Sussex at Say's Court.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CURE OF THE EARL OF SUSSEX

QUEEN ELIZABETH was fond of governing by parties, so as to balance two opposing interests and keep in her own hand the power of making either the stronger. The two nobles who at present stood as rivals in her favour had very different qualities to recommend them. Sussex was a soldier, and had done good service in Ireland and in Scotland, and especially in the great northern rebellion in 1569. He was of more ancient and honourable descent than his rival, whose family history was stained by the downfall of his grandfather, the oppressive minister of Henry VII, and by that of his father, the Duke of Northumberland, who was executed in 1553. But in person, features, and wit, Leicester had advantages more than equal to the military services, the noble blood, and the frank bearing of Sussex. The latter, as we have seen from his letter to Tressilian, was at this time seriously ill, and his illness happened so luckily for Leicester as to give rise to strange suspicions among the public, and the retainers of each nobleman flocked round their patron; and carried their arms even in the neighbourhood of the queen herself.

In these circumstances Say's Court was watched like a beleaguered fort, and Tressilian and his attendants were repeatedly challenged by sentinels as they approached.

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The whole place was filled with armed retainers, but in the hall into which Tressilian was ushered while his arrival was being announced to Sussex, he found only two gentlemen in waiting. One was an elderly gentleman, plain and soldier-like, of small stature, stout limbs, and an ungraceful bearing. The other, who was young and had a fine person, was clothed like a gay courtier in a crimson velvet cloak, richly ornamented with lace and embroidery, a jewelled bonnet, and pearl earrings, while his face indicated an enterprising and determined character. The first was Blount, master of horse to the Earl of Sussex, and the other was named Walter Raleigh. They rose to welcome Tressilian, but gave him sad news of their lord's health. His case seemed hopeless, and some of his followers were even combining their fortunes to buy a ship, hoping after his death to strike a blow at those who had killed their noble lord and then sail off to the Indies.

Tressilian was soon summoned to the earl's chamber, where he was much shocked by the alteration disease had made in his features since he had last seen him. The earl received him kindly and would have questioned him on his affairs, but Tressilian turned the conversation to the earl's illness, and was astonished to find that the symptoms were exactly those which Wayland had predicted. He did not hesitate therefore to relate the story of his attendant. Sussex listened with incredulous attention till he heard the name of Demetrius Doboobie. This name, he remembered, had been mentioned by his cook, who had been examined as to the ingredients of a certain sauce, after partaking of which the earl had been taken ill; some of the materials had been supplied by a dealer in herbs, named Doboobie.

Wayland was called, and the whole story was retold to him; and even when Sussex warned him that if he were sent by enemies to finish the work they had begun it would go hard with him, he professed the utmost confidence in

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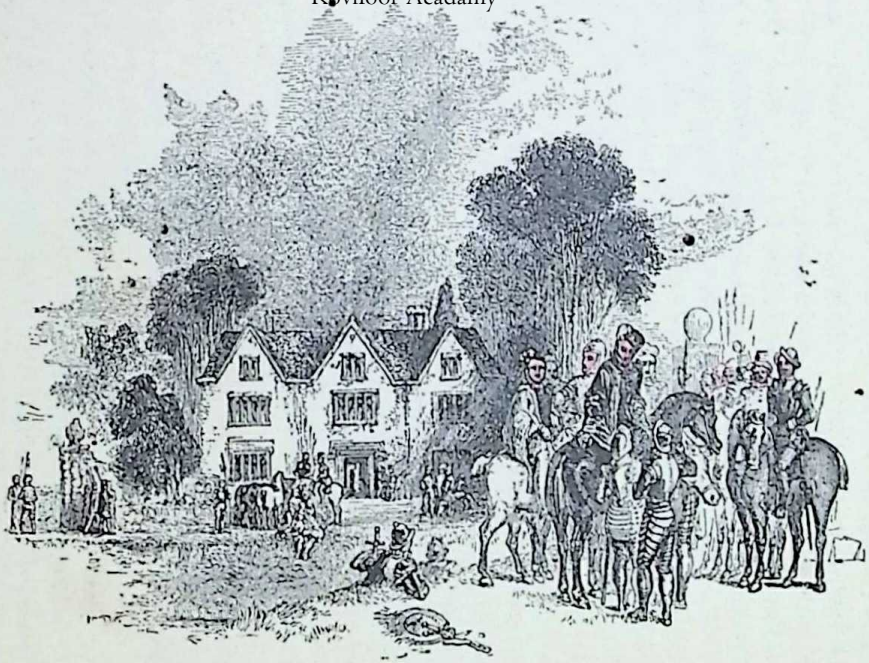

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his remedy and was willing to bear all the consequences. He stipulated, however, that as he was to be solely responsible, no other physician should be permitted to meddle with the treatment.

The earl, convinced of Wayland's honesty, agreed; and after calling his secretary and chamberlain to witness that Tressilian was in no way responsible for the effects that the medicine might produce, since he took it of his own free choice, he was undressed and laid in bed, and drank off the potion which Wayland had prepared. After this, by Wayland's directions, he was left in absolute repose, all the doors were shut, and all noise in the house was strictly prohibited.

At dawn next morning Blount, Raleigh, and two other gentlemen of Sussex's party, named Tracy and Markham, tired with being on guard all night on behalf of their sick lord, were roused by a knocking at the outer gate. Raleigh went out to see what it meant, and on returning could not help laughing at his companions for their forlorn and miserable appearance.

'Cease your raillery, Walter,' said Markham, 'which suits neither time nor place, and tell us who was at the gate.'

'Doctor Masters, the queen's physician, sent by her special orders to inquire after the earl's health.'

'Ha! what!' exclaimed Tracy; 'that was no slight mark of favour. Is Masters with my lord at present?'

'No,' said Walter, 'he is half-way back to Greenwich by this time, and highly offended.'

'You did not refuse him admittance?' exclaimed Tracy.

'You were surely not so mad?' cried Blount.

'I refused him admittance as flatly, Blount, as you would refuse a penny to a blind beggar; as obstinately, Tracy, as you ever shut your door on a dun.'

'He has ruined us all now,' said Tracy. 'My lord may

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live or die, he will never have a look of favour from her Majesty again.'

'Nor the means of making fortunes for his followers,' said the young gallant, smiling contemptuously. 'There lies the sore point. My good sirs, I make less lamentation over my lord than some of you; but when it comes to doing him service, I will yield to none of you. Had this learned physician entered, there would have been such a quarrel between him and Tressilian's doctor, that not the sleeper only, but the very dead, would have been wakened. I will bear the blame of opposing the queen's orders.'

'Thus then fly off your dreams of court favour,' said Blount, 'and your hopes of fortune.'

'No,' said the young man, 'not while there are wars, and while the sea has waves. The rich west has lands undreamed of, and Britain contains bold hearts to venture in quest of them.' And he left them, to walk for a space in the open air.

Morning was well advanced when Tressilian came down with the joyful news that the earl had awakened much better in body and more cheerful in mind. The news of the repulse of the queen's physician was soon communicated to Sussex, who, though at first amused at the incident, immediately ordered Blount to go to the queen's palace at Greenwich, taking Tracy and young Raleigh with him, to offer compliments and thanks to his sovereign, and an explanation of the repulse of Doctor Masters.

'A plague on it,' said Blount, as he descended the stair. 'I would rather have carried a challenge from him to the Earl of Leicester. Come with me, Tracy, and you too, Master Walter Wittypate, and let me see if your clever brains can help a plain fellow with a shrewd device or two.' But to Blount's annoyance Raleigh would not start till he had fetched his brilliant cloak and brushed his clothes

They set forth by boat on the Thames, and as they

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drew near to Greenwich they noticed the queen's barge, manned by her watermen in royal liveries and displaying the royal flag, lying near the great stairs with other barges, all ready for the departure of the queen and her retinue. Blount, thinking that this would not be a favourable opportunity for his mission, would have gone back, but Raleigh urged him on. They landed and approached the gate of the palace, only to learn that no one could be admitted, as Her Majesty was just coming out. Blount again wanted to return, but Raleigh would not budge till the queen came out.

'You are mad, stark mad!' said Blount.

'And you', said Walter, 'are suddenly turned coward. I have seen you face half a score of shag-headed Irish soldiers, and now you would blink and go back to shun the frown of a fair lady.'

At this moment the gates opened and Queen Elizabeth came forth amid a crowd of lords and ladies. Raleigh, who had probably never yet been so near his sovereign, pressed forward in spite of Blount's attempts to pull him back, and fixed his gaze with a mixture of curiosity and admiration on the queen's approach. The queen, who was never indifferent to the admiration which her beauty excited in her subjects, threw a keen glance on the youth as she approached, and a slight incident attracted her attention to him yet more strongly. The night had been rainy, and just where he stood, a small quantity of mud lay in the queen's way. As she hesitated, the gallant, throwing his cloak from his shoulders, laid it on the muddy spot so as to ensure her stepping over it dryshod. Elizabeth looked with a smile at the young man, nodded, and passed on to her barge.

'Come along, sir coxcomb,' said Blount; 'your gay mantle will need the brush to-day.'

'This cloak,' said the youth, 'shall never be brushed while it is in my possession.'

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Next moment a messenger came to summon Raleigh to the queen's presence, and Blount was left shaking his head and exclaiming, 'Who would have thought this!' as he turned and made his way back to Deptford.

Meanwhile the young cavalier entered a small boat, which was quickly rowed under the stern of the royal barge, where the queen sat beneath an awning, attended by a few ladies. At a sign from her the skiff was drawn alongside, and Raleigh stepped on board with graceful agility, still carrying on his arm his muddied cloak.

'You have spoiled a gay mantle in our service, young man,' said the queen. 'We thank you for the service, though the manner of offering it was somewhat bold.'

'In a sovereign's need,' answered the youth, 'it is each subject's duty to be bold.'

'Well, your gallantry shall not go unrewarded,' said the queen. 'Go to the wardrobe-keeper and he will supply a new suit to replace that which you have cast away in our service. Or would you have gold?'

'Madam,' replied Raleigh, 'I only beg permission—if it is not too high an honour—to wear the cloak which did you this trifling service. When your Majesty's foot touched it, it became a mantle fit for a prince.'

The queen was greatly pleased by Raleigh's ready wit and pleasant manner, and asked who he was. A look of haughtiness and severity, however, passed over her face when she learned that he was a gentleman of the household of the Earl of Sussex. She spoke of the rebuff given that morning to her physician and to herself who sent him, and said that she would receive—at present, at least—no excuse.

'Madam,' said Raleigh, 'my Lord of Sussex knew that the offence was almost treason, and could think of nothing but to secure the offender and place him in your Majesty's hands and at your mercy. I am that offender; the blame is mine alone.'

'What!' said the queen. 'Was it you that repelled my messenger and physician? What caused such boldness in one who seems devoted to his sovereign?'

Raleigh told the queen the story of the earl's treatment and his partial recovery from his illness.

'By my word, I am glad he is better,' said the queen. 'But you were overbold to refuse to admit Doctor Masters. Is it not written in the Holy Scriptures, "in the multitude of counsel there is safety"?'

'Yes, madam,' said Walter, 'but the safety is for the physicians and not for the patient.'

At this stroke of ready wit the queen laughed, and asked the young man's name. On hearing it, she remembered that a young soldier of that name had seen military service and been wounded in Ireland, and now learned that this was he.

'You are very young,' she said, 'to have fought so well and to speak so well. But you must not escape penance for turning back Masters. So, Master Raleigh, you must wear the muddy cloak in token of penitence. And here,' she added, giving him a jewel of gold, 'I give you this to wear at the collar.' Raleigh, with all the grace of a born courtier, knelt, and, as he received the jewel, kissed the fingers that gave it.

Soon after, the queen gave sudden orders to turn the barge in the direction of Deptford, where she would pay the Earl of Sussex a surprise visit and make personal inquiries after his health. Raleigh would gladly have received permission to go ahead and prepare his master for the royal visit, but Elizabeth sharply told him to keep his advice till it was required.

Sussex was discussing with Tressilian how he could repair the supposed loss of the queen's favour, when he was infinitely surprised to hear of her immediate approach. Cursing inwardly the chance which brought this gracious visit on him unawares, he hastily prepared himself to

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meet the queen. He met her as she entered the great hall, and at once he perceived that there was a cloud on her brow. Her jealous eye had noticed the martial array of armed gentlemen and retainers.

'Is this a royal garrison, my Lord of Sussex,' said she, 'or have we by accident passed Say's Court and landed at our Tower of London?'

Without waiting for a reply she went on to say that she intended to take up the matter of this quarrel with Leicester and put a stop to the dangerous practice of keeping so many armed followers, as if for civil war; she congratulated Lord Sussex on his recovery, forgave the rebuff offered to her physician, and announced her wish to take the wild slip, young Raleigh, into her own household. After a very brief stay she departed, leaving doubt and apprehension in the minds of Sussex and his followers.

CHAPTER IX

FACTIONS AT COURT

In accordance with her promise to take up the matter of the quarrel between Sussex and Leicester, Elizabeth at an early date summoned both these nobles to attend her court. In the meantime Sussex, who had heard from Tressilian the story of Amy Robsart, could not resist seizing the opportunity to humiliate Leicester and lower him in royal favour by sending a petition, which Tressilian had prepared, to the queen. He would not listen to Tressilian's proposal to appeal first to Leicester, as the curate had recommended, for now was the time, he said, to accumulate every charge against Leicester and his household. Tressilian had to give way, though he could not help suspecting that the earl was more interested in using the case for his own ends than in securing the success of the petition.

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On the appointed day the two lords prepared their retinues to appear at the queen's court, and Raleigh came to see that the followers of Sussex should present as gay and fashionable an appearance as those of Leicester. At noon precisely the rival earls, each followed by a long and glittering train of friends and followers, entered the palace-yard of Greenwich. Sussex came by water from Deptford, while Leicester arrived by land, so that they entered the courtyard from opposite sides. No sign of greeting passed between them, though each looked full at the other. Almost at the minute of their arrival the castle bell tolled and the gates of the palace opened; and the earls entered, followed by those gentlemen of their train whose rank gave them that privilege. The inferior attendants remained in the courtyard, where the opposite parties eyed each other with hatred and scorn, but were restrained from open violence and tumult by the strict commands of their leaders and by the presence of an armed guard of unusual strength, which Elizabeth had placed there.

Within the palace the trains of the two lords arranged themselves on opposite sides of a long and lofty gallery, beyond which lay the queen's presence-chamber. The folding doors at the end opened, and the earls moved, slow and stately, towards the entrance, Sussex followed by Tressilian, Blount, and Raleigh, and Leicester by Varney. Court etiquette gave Sussex the right to enter first, as his earldom was the older. Raleigh alone was allowed to enter with him, the others being stopped by the Usher of the Black Rod, who had orders, he said, to exclude all followers. When Leicester approached with Varney, the latter was also refused admission.

'How is this, Master Bowyer?' said Leicester to the usher, who owed his position to the earl's influence. 'Do you not know that this is my friend and follower?'

Bowyer explained that his orders were strict, and that Raleigh had been admitted as one of the queen's household.

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'You are a knave, an ungrateful knave,' said Leicester; 'but he that has done can undo—you shall not long swagger in authority.'

With this threat, he entered and made his reverence to the queen, who, attired with even more than her usual splendour, and surrounded by a group of ministers and courtiers, stood ready to receive the homage of her subjects. She looked alternately at him and at Sussex and seemed about to speak, when the insulted usher appeared and knelt before her. On being permitted to speak, he reported Leicester's conduct, and asked whether he was to carry out her Majesty's commands. The queen's haughty spirit could not bear such interference with her orders, and having turned to Leicester and rebuked him soundly for daring to assume any authority in her household, she dismissed the usher with a commendation for his obedience.

Leicester wisely attempted no defence of his conduct, and the queen, seeing the friends of Sussex exchanging glances of congratulation at her favourite's discomfiture, and not willing that either party should triumph, turned to Sussex and said:

'What I say to my Lord of Leicester I say also to you, my Lord of Sussex. You must needs strut at the court of England at the head of a faction of your own. My grandfather and my father in their wisdom debarred the nobles of this civilized land from travelling with such disorderly retinues; and do you think that because I am a woman their sceptre has in my hand been changed into a distaff? My Lord of Leicester and you, my Lord of Sussex, I command you both to be friends with each other; or, by the crown I wear, you shall find an enemy who will be too strong for both of you.'

Each of the nobles disclaimed having given any cause of offence to the other, but spoke so bitterly that they were on the point of openly quarrelling.

'My lords,' said the queen, 'if you cannot keep your

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temper, we will find means to cure you of your bad humour. Let us see you join hands and forget your idle feuds.'

Each was unwilling to make the first advance, and it was only when the queen ordered a barge to be got ready to convey them as prisoners to the Tower that Leicester gave way and offered Sussex his hand, saying that he could bear prison but could not bear to lose the queen's presence.

The two nobles shook hands, to the satisfaction of the queen, who went on to say that the brawls of the leaders were a bad example to the followers, giving rise to unruly conduct. For example, she said, she had received a complaint against one Varney, a gentleman of Leicester's household, for the removal of the daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart from Lidcote Hall.

Leicester started and turned so pale that the queen, thinking he was ill, ordered Doctor Masters to be called, and assured the earl that she would not blame him for the misdeeds of his retainer. Leicester's confusion was so great that he could not give an intelligible answer, and the queen, becoming suspicious, asked:

'Is there more in this than we see—or than you, my lord, wish we should see? Where is this Varney? Call him here instantly. There is one Tressilian also mentioned in this petition; let them both come before us.'

'Is it true, sir,' she said when Varney appeared, 'that you have carried off and secretly married the daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart?' Varney knelt down, and replied with a look of profound contrition that he had, indeed, wooed and won Mistress Amy Robsart.

Leicester quivered with indignation at this falsehood, and he almost manned himself to confess his secret marriage at the risk of losing the queen's favour; but the thought of the triumph of Sussex checked the impulse, and pressing his lips close together he stood listening attentively to every word.

'Wooed and won!' cried the queen. 'Why not ask her hand openly from her father?'

'If it please your Grace,' said Varney, still on his knees, 'I dared not do so, for he had promised her hand to a gentleman—Master Edmund Tressilian, whom I now see in your presence.'

'And you are married to the girl?' asked the queen.

'Yes,' said Varney after a moment's hesitation.

'False villain!' said Leicester, bursting out in his rage; but he could say no more. The queen observed his anger, but went on to question Varney if his master knew anything of this work of his.

'Gracious madam,' said Varney, 'my lord was the cause of the whole matter.'

'You villain, would you betray me?' cried Leicester; but the queen ordered Varney to heed no one's commands but her own.

'They are omnipotent, gracious madam,' answered Varney, 'but I cannot speak of my master's concerns to other ears than yours.'

The queen ordered all those present to fall back, and Varney went on:

'Some deep, secret feeling has of late abstracted my lord's mind from the cares of his household, which he used to govern so strictly, and without this I should not have had means or leisure to commit this folly. Look at him, madam, how pale and trembling he stands. How unlike his usual majesty of manner—since he received that fatal packet!'

'What packet, and whence?' said Elizabeth eagerly.

'From whence, madam, I cannot guess. But he wears next his heart a lock of hair, from which is hung a golden jewel shaped like a heart—no idol was ever worshipped with such devotion.'

'You are a prying knave to watch your master so closely,' said Elizabeth blushing, for she knew well enough that she

herself had given Leicester the trinket. 'But what was the colour of the braid of hair you talk of?'

'It was paler than the purest gold,' said Varney, with a significant glance at the queen's own hair; 'more like the last parting sunbeam of the softest day of spring.'

'Enough—enough,' said the queen; 'you are a foolish fellow'—and turning quickly she walked up to Leicester.

'You have a gossiping servant in this same Varney, my lord,' she said. 'It is lucky that you trust him with nothing that can harm you in our opinion.'

Greatly relieved by these words, Leicester knelt at the queen's feet and broke out into expressions of deep and passionate attachment, which perhaps at that moment were not altogether false.

'Rise, my lord,' said the queen, 'and be what you have always been, the grace of our court and the support of our throne. Your mistress may be forced to reprimand you, but never without owning your merits. I think no sovereign had ever a truer servant than I have in you.'

A murmur of assent arose from Leicester's friends, which those of Sussex dared not oppose. Leicester, trusting to the restored favour of the queen, asked her commands concerning Varney.

'In truth we had forgotten this matter,' said the queen. 'Where is Tressilian, the accuser? Let him come before us.'

Tressilian appeared, and made a low reverence. The queen, who had made inquiries about him, found that his appearance agreed with the description she had received of him as a scholar and a soldier, and felt pity for his misfortune.

'Look you, Master Tressilian,' she said, 'an arrow lost is not a bow broken. Your true affection has been, it seems, but ill requited by this Amy; but you have scholarship, and you know there have been false lovers in all times and countries. Forget, good sir, this faithless lady, and

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be more wise when next you love.' And seeing that Tressilian seemed unpersuaded, she added, 'What would you have? The woman cannot marry both of you, and she is Varney's wedded wife.'

'I know it, most gracious sovereign,' replied Tressilian 'Yet I submit to your Majesty that this Varney carried off and married the lady against her will and without her father's consent, that he is unfit to be her husband, and that she should in justice be returned to her sorrowing father.'

'My lord of Leicester,' said the queen, turning to that nobleman, 'will you warrant on your honour and to the best of your belief that Amy Robsart married your servant of her own free will and is treated by him as an honourable lady?'

This was a home-thrust that nearly staggered Leicester, but having gone too far to recede he answered, after some hesitation, 'To the best of my belief—indeed on my certain knowledge—she married of her own free will and is honourably treated.'

Tressilian would still have pressed his suit, but the queen told him he must rest content in the meantime with the earl's word, and she would look into the matter more at leisure.

Elizabeth then reminded Leicester that she intended to visit him in a week's time at his castle of Kenilworth, and invited Sussex to attend her on that occasion, an invitation which the latter, however unwillingly, was obliged to accept as a command. Sussex and Leicester were ordered to see that Tressilian and Varney should also attend at Kenilworth, and that Varney should bring his wife. The court was then dismissed, and the queen departed to hold a meeting of the Privy Council, of which both Leicester and Sussex were members.

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CHAPTER X

QUEEN ELIZABETH

THE Earl of Leicester realized how deeply he had committed himself by the words which had been forced from him at the audience we have described. He felt that he must at all costs retain the queen's favour, which would be lost to him for ever if, after what had occurred at the interview, he acknowledged himself the husband of the humble Amy Robsart. Accordingly, at the debate for which the Privy Council had been called together, he used his utmost powers on behalf of such measures as he knew would be pleasing to Elizabeth. His eloquence carried all before it. After a brief sitting the Council was dismissed, and the queen went forth to take the air upon the river.

Never did courtiers pay more deference to the Earl of Leicester than when he passed through the crowded anterooms to the river-side to attend her Majesty to her barge. They considered that the day's audience was a decisive triumph for the earl, and all were anxious to offer congratulations and obtain a glance of favour, or even a mere recognition. On the other hand, never did Leicester show such ready and condescending courtesy; for all he had a bow, a smile at least, and often a kind word. Even Master Bowyer was forgiven. 'You did your duty this morning,' said the earl graciously; 'and if I remember anything of the incident, it shall be in your favour.'

Among others who hoped to enjoy and use the sunshine of the earl's favour there came forward one Master Robert Laneham, who held the small office of keeper of the council-chamber door, but who had no little conceit of his own importance. He ventured to ask the earl to procure him a place in the queen's train during her progress to Kenilworth. Leicester, in his good humour, granted this request, though somewhat contemptuously. 'Come to Kenilworth

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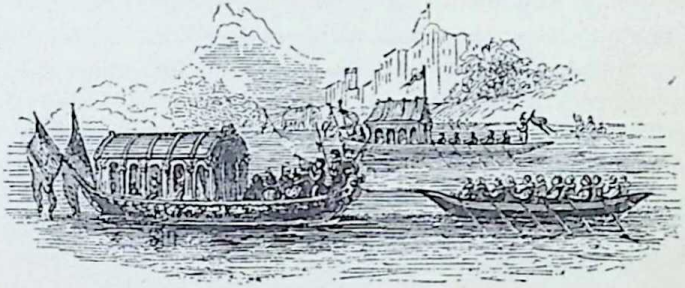
if you wish,' said he; 'there will be plenty of fools there besides.'

Nothing daunted by the tone of this reply, Laneham went on to ask permission that his wife should come too. 'I may not take her with me,' he explained, 'as her Highness's orders are strict against officers taking their wives with them in a royal progress. I beg your lordship to find room for her in some pageant, in disguise, as it were; so that, not being known for my wife, she may give no offence.'

'A plague on you both!' said Leicester, stung into passion by the recollection of his own case which this



ROYAL BARGES, IN THE TIME OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

speech excited. But instantly recalled to himself by the wonder and terror produced by his words, he added hastily, 'Come to Kenilworth and bring with you whom you will.'

Leicester moved hastily on, neglecting the attentions of the crowd of courtiers, and hurried into a small drawing-room to take a moment's breath unobserved.

'What am I now,' he said to himself, 'that am stung to anger by the words of a mean fool! Can I not by one bold stroke free myself from a state so irksome, so unhonoured? What if I kneel to Elizabeth and throw myself on her mercy?'

This train of thought was interrupted by Varney, who rushed in saying that the queen had entered her barge and was asking for the earl, and that the places reserved

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for them were already filled by Raleigh and Tressilian. Leicester's first impulse was to send the excuse of illness, but finally he went towards the river.

'We have waited, my Lord of Leicester,' said the queen coldly. Leicester pleaded that the threatened loss of her favour earlier in the day had so disturbed him that his master of horse had found him in a state which scarcely permitted him to attend her Majesty.

'How is this?' said Elizabeth to Varney. 'Has your lord been ill?'

'A slight fainting fit,' answered the ready-witted Varney, 'as your Grace may observe from his present condition.'

The queen ordered room to be made for Leicester on the barge. Raleigh, with a profound bow and a look of the deepest humiliation, rose to make way, but a noble courtier, Lord Willoughby, seeing that the queen did not wish young Raleigh to go, rose saying, 'It is not for us old courtiers to hide the sunshine from the young ones, and with her Majesty's leave I will take a place in the boat which the ladies occupy.'

The queen laughingly agreed, and directed him to make room for himself in the second boat.

Leicester took the empty place in the queen's barge, and fixed his attention by an effort on the necessity of retaining her favour. For some time he kept up a flow of witty conversation that delighted her, till at last, remembering his health, she playfully imposed a temporary silence upon him.

'My lords,' said the queen, 'we will call you to counsel on an amusing matter more fitted to be treated of now amid mirth and music than in graver surroundings. Which of you knows anything of Orson Pinnet, who calls himself keeper of our royal bears?'

'Orson Pinnet,' said Sussex, 'was a stout soldier before he was wounded in the Irish war. I commend him to your Grace as to one who has always been kind to good and trusty servants.'

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'It is our purpose to be so,' said the queen, 'especially to poor soldiers and sailors. We would give yonder royal palace of Greenwich to be an hospital for their use rather than that they should call us ungrateful. But this is not the question. Pinnet's petition complains that men haunt the play-houses, especially to see the plays of one William Shakespeare, and neglect the manly amusement of bear-baiting; they will rather throng to see these players kill one another in jest than to see our royal dogs and bears worry each other in earnest. What do you say to this?'

'Gracious madam,' said Sussex, 'you must not expect an old soldier like me to prefer battles in sport to battles in earnest. And yet I wish Will Shakespeare no harm; he is a stout man at quarterstaff, and, they say, made a tough fight with the gamekeepers of Sir Thomas Lucy'. He went on, however, to extol the virtues of bear-baiting as superior to those of the stage.

Leicester, being asked his opinion, said that the players were witty knaves, whose jests kept the minds of the common people from busying themselves with state affairs and listening to traitorous and disloyal talk. For when men were intent on seeing how Marlowe, Shakespeare, and other playwriters worked out their fanciful plots, their minds were withdrawn from the conduct of their rulers.

'We do not fear the consideration of our own conduct, my lord,' answered Elizabeth. 'The more closely it is examined, the more manifest will appear its true motives.'

An eminent bishop, who was one of the company, said that these plays not only introduced profane and coarse language, but also reflections on the origin and nature of government, that set at defiance the laws of both God and man.

'It is foolish to argue against the use of a thing from its abuse,' said the queen. 'We think there is something in this Shakespeare's plays that is worth twenty bear-gardens

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and that they may entertain and instruct even the generations that will follow us.'

'Your Majesty's reign will need no such feeble aid to make it remembered,' said Leicester; 'and yet this Shakespeare has said many things about your Majesty's happy government that will stand against what has been spoken of by the reverend bishop. I could wish that my nephew, Philip Sidney, were here to recite some of them.'

At the suggestion of the queen that perhaps some of those present could remember them, Raleigh recited with great skill and delicacy the vision of Oberon, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid, all armed: a certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal, throned by the west;
> And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon;
> And the imperial votaress passed on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy free.

The verses were probably not new to the queen, to whom they are thought to have referred. But they were not the less welcome when repeated by such a speaker as Raleigh. Murmuring over the last line,

> In maiden meditation, fancy free,

she dropped into the Thames the supplication of Orson Pinnet, leaving it to the mercy of the tide.

When they returned to the palace, Elizabeth further honoured Leicester by leaning on his arm as he escorted her to the palace gate. All her words and actions combined to express a degree of favour which he had not till then attained. Strange as it may appear, his enjoyment of the queen's good humour was marred, not so much by the thought of the perils of his secret marriage, as by the marks

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of grace which Elizabeth showed from time to time to young Raleigh. And in the evening an event occurred which roused his jealousy still further.

The nobles and courtiers who had attended the queen on her pleasure trip on the river were invited to a banquet in the palace, which the queen, however, following her usual custom, did not attend. After the banquet the court met again in the gardens, and there the queen suddenly asked a lady what had become of the young Squire Lackcloak, as she called Raleigh. The lady answered that she had seen Master Raleigh standing at the window of a small pavilion that overlooked the Thames, writing on the glass with a diamond ring. Curiosity induced the queen to go there, and she found these words written on the window :

Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.

She smiled. 'It is a pretty beginning,' she said to her companion. 'It would be good-natured to complete it for him. Try your rhyming powers.'

The lady, however, disclaimed all poetical ability.

'Let me see,' said the queen ; 'might not the answer (for want of a better) run thus ?—

If thy mind fail thee, do not climb at all.'

She wrote the words beneath Raleigh's line, and went away, laughing to see the young cavalier, who had been lingering in the neighbourhood, steal back to the place. She cautioned her companion not to mention the matter, but though the lady promised secrecy she told it to Leicester without delay.

Meanwhile Raleigh, his heart beating high with hope at the queen's encouragement of his ambition, rejoined the retinue of Sussex. That earl soon after returned to Say's Court and, exhausted with his late illness and the fatigues of the day, retired to his chamber and demanded the attendance of Wayland, his successful physician.

Wayland was absent, but arrived shortly after in a small boat; he would not, however, obey the earl's call till he had seen Tressilian, and the latter was much surprised to find him under the influence of some strong emotion. Wayland had gone with a friend to see the palace clock, as he was interested in such work, and there in a turret near the clock-tower he had seen his old master Doboobie.

'Thank God, I saw him first,' he said, 'and he did not see me. He was dressed in a strange antique fashion, but he cannot disguise himself from me. I will not tempt Providence by remaining near him. I must fly away to-morrow. It would be death to stay within his reach, for once before, as you know, he attempted my life.'

Tressilian had already intended to send Wayland down to Cumnor, so he now gave him his ring as a token to Giles Gosling, and dispatched him to watch what was happening at Cumnor Hall.

Wayland stayed only long enough to pay a last visit to the Earl of Sussex, divide his medicine into proper portions, and give instructions concerning his treatment and diet.

'Let his food be prepared only by the trustiest hands,' he said, 'and if he goes to Kenilworth, let him eat and drink only what his own servants have prepared and tested. He can make his illness and its treatment the excuse for this.' Then he departed without waiting for the morning.

CHAPTER XI

LEICESTER CONSULTS THE STARS

When Leicester returned to his lodging, after a day so important and so harassing, he seemed to feel as much fatigue as a sailor after a perilous storm. He sat silent and motionless in his room, and did not even move when

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Varney entered' and stood waiting for his lord to speak. He waited in vain, and at last said, 'May I congratulate your lordship on your victory over your most formidable rival?'

Leicester raised his head and said, 'You, Varney, whose invention has involved me in a web of mean and dangerous falsehood, know what small reason there is for congratulation. Yet I cannot blame you, for it was my own ambition that made me traitor to my love.'

'Say rather, my lord, that your love has been traitor to your greatness. To make my honoured lady a countess, you have missed the chance of being yourself—a KING.'

'You rave, Varney,' answered Leicester. 'I think God, when He gave Elizabeth the heart of a woman, gave her the head of a man to control its follies. She will accept love tokens and sweet sonnets—aye, and answer them too—but she would not barter one atom of her power for all that love could give.'

'If such is her character,' said Varney, 'you may remain at least her favourite, provided the lady at Cumnor Place continues in her present obscurity. And why should she not consent to do so, rather than diminish her lord's greatness by an attempt to share it too early?'

'Yet she must be seen at Kenilworth,' said Leicester. 'Elizabeth will not forget that she has commanded her presence.'

'Let me think over that point,' said Varney. 'I must perfect a scheme which will satisfy the queen and please my lady without betraying the fatal secret.'

Not wishing to pursue this subject, Leicester allowed Varney to depart. He opened a window and looked long and anxiously at the stars; and then going to a small door in a corner of the apartment, which opened on a narrow stair leading up to a turret, he called, 'Alasco, descend.'

A little man appeared, with white hair and a long white

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beard reaching down to his waist; dark eyebrows over piercing black eyes, and a fresh and ruddy countenance were in strange contrast with his venerable hair.

'Your prediction has failed, Alasco. My enemy is recovering,' said Leicester, after greeting the astrologer, for such was the old man.

'Let me remind you, my son, that I did not foretell his death. Even the predictions we make from the stars only show the natural and probable course of events, but that course is controlled by the will of Heaven. Yet if I knew his name, I could make another horoscope.'

'His name is a secret,' said the earl; 'yet I must admit that your prediction has not been untruthful. He has been dangerously sick. But have you again consulted the stars for me?'

'Here, my son, is the map of your fortunes. The stars indicate that a yet prouder title, a yet higher rank is within your reach. It is for you to guess their meaning, not for me to name it.'

The earl made two or three strides through the room, evidently much moved by the astrologer's words; but as he turned he caught a glance of shrewd understanding in the old man's eyes that roused his suspicion.

'Wretch!' he said, 'if you dare to trifle with me I will have your skin stripped from your flesh.'

The astrologer showed some alarm at his patron's fury, and in proof of his innocence he pointed out that he had been shut up in the turret for the last twenty-four hours, and that the earl had held the key. 'If nothing has happened within that time,' said he, 'to secure your power or advance your favour, then I am indeed a cheat and impostor.'

Remembering the events of the day, Leicester was satisfied with this reasoning. He next asked the astrologer to say if, among the signs of brilliant fortune, there were none of coming danger.

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'Thus far only can I answer,' said Alasco, 'that danger seems threatened by means of a youth, and, as I think, a rival, who comes from the western quarter.'

The earl interpreted this as indicating either Tressilian or Raleigh, both of whom came from the west. He handed the astrologer a purse of gold, and summoning Varney, gave orders that the man's wants should be attended to, but that he was to hold communication with no one.

Now this astrologer was no other than Demetrius Doboobie in disguise, whom Varney was using for his own purposes to play upon Leicester's ambition. He now took him to his own room, and set him down to a meal that had been prepared for him. Having learned the result of the interview with the earl, Varney told Alasco that he must depart at once. The latter at first refused, but was soon persuaded by the news that the Earl of Sussex was offering a reward for his capture as a seller of poison. Varney demanded how it had come about that the poison had failed, but Alasco could only say that he did not know; there was only one man, once his servant, who might have stolen his secret, but he was dead—'borne to heaven on the wing of a fiery dragon,' he said. He little knew that Wayland lived and had seen him that very day.

'You must go to an old house of mine in the country,' said Varney, 'and there your first task must be to prepare some more of that same medicine.'

'I will make no more of that dose,' said he, resolutely.

'Then', said Varney, 'you shall be hanged for what you have made already. But, you learned rogue, have you not said that a moderate dose has mild effects, in no way dangerous to the human frame, only producing depression of spirits such as would keep a bird from flying out of a cage if the door were left open? Your reward shall be princely if you do no serious harm to her health—otherwise your punishment shall be as signal.'

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'*Her* health!' said Alasco; 'then it is a woman I am to use my skill upon.'

'Yes,' said Varney. 'It is most expedient that she should not go to these Kenilworth revels, and that it be thought that she stays away of her own wish.'

'I am not to be asked to injure life,' said Alasco, 'and I must have opportunity to do all I require, and all facilities for concealment or escape, should I be detected.'

'You shall have all, you infidel. Why, man, what do you take me for?'

Alasco walked to the door, and as he departed to his own apartment he answered, 'I take you, Richard Varney, for a greater villain than I have been myself. But I am in your power, and I must serve you till my term be out.'

Varney followed him, and locked behind him the door at the foot of the turret-stair. Returning, he called for a fresh flask of wine, for he did not trust the unfinished one that Alasco had left, and drank off a full cup. 'It is strange,' he said, 'I never speak for a few minutes to this fellow, Alasco, but my mouth feels soiled with the fumes of arsenic—pah!'

He called for Lambourne, who appeared with a flushed cheek and unsteady step. 'You are drunk, you villain,' said Varney, 'but I know you can throw off your drunken folly at pleasure. Be sober at once, or it will be the worse for you.'

Lambourne left the apartment for a few minutes, and returned with his face composed, his hair adjusted, and his dress in order, and waited his master's commands. These were to go down to Cumnor Place with the learned doctor, to use him well on the journey, but not to let him escape, even to shoot him should he attempt it; and to carry letters to Foster instructing him to lodge the doctor in the east wing of the mansion and to give him the use of the old laboratory in that part of the house, but no access to the countess. Finally, Lambourne was to keep sober and await Varney's arrival at Cumnor.

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Varney departed, and Lambourne could not resist the temptation of the wine. He seized the flask, and without troubling to use a cup took a long draught. 'Were it not for this accursed habit,' he said, 'I might climb as high as Varney himself. But I will drink nothing to-morrow save water—nothing save fair water.'

CHAPTER XII

NEW ARRIVALS AT CUMNOR

THE public room of the 'Black Bear' at Cumnor held a larger and merrier company than usual, a fair having been held in the neighbourhood. A pedlar, or travelling merchant, was taking an active share in the mirth. He had his smile for all fresh arrivals, his broad laugh with mine host, and his jest at dashing Master Goldthred. A merry debate was in progress between him and the cloth merchant on the relative merits of certain goods, when the trampling of horses was heard, and the landlord went out to see who his new guests were. Presently he returned with his nephew, Michael Lambourne, tolerably drunk and having the astrologer under his escort. Alasco was anxious to go straight on to his destination, but Lambourne would listen to no advice.

'A gallon of your best, uncle,' he shouted, producing a handful of gold and silver, 'and let it go round to the health of the noble Earl of Leicester.'

'I wish I knew how to get money as easily as you do, Mike,' said the host.

'Why, uncle, I will tell you a secret. Do you see this little old fellow here? He can coin gold faster than I can talk.'

'Are you mad?' whispered the doctor to him. 'Can you not let us be gone without drawing every one's eyes on us?'

'What do you say?' said Lambourne. 'By heavens, sirs, if any one dares to look at this old gentleman, I shall slash the eyes out of his head. So sit down, old friend, and be merry—these are my friends, and will betray no man.'

Giles Gosling also advised his nephew to withdraw to a private room, but in vain, and the astrologer, seeing that his guide was uncontrollable, sat down in the most obscure corner he could find, while Lambourne renewed his acquaintance with Goldthred and others, and called upon them to share the wine he had ordered, an offer which many of them were not backward in accepting.

'Now tell me, Mike,' said Goldthred after some time, 'how does the linen wear that you won of me in our wager?'

'Why, very well, as you may see,' answered Mike. 'I will give you another drink in honour of it.' And he called for more wine.

'You will win no more such wagers, friend Mike,' said Goldthred. 'Tony Foster swears you shall never darken his doors again, for your oaths are enough to blow the roof off a decent man's dwelling.'

'Does he say so, the hypocritical miser?' shouted Lambourne. 'I will wager fifty gold pieces against the first five shelves of your shop that I make Tony Foster come down here before we have drunk three more rounds.'

The amount of the bet rather sobered Goldthred, and he proposed a wager of five gold pieces on either side. Lambourne agreed, and a boy was sent to Cumnor Place with a message for Foster. After an interval—which they spent in drinking and buffoonery—the messenger returned, saying that Master Foster was coming presently.

'What did he say, boy?' asked Lambourne.

'If it please your worship, when I gave him your message he said that your worship might go to the infernal regions, but he called me back and bid me say that you might come to him. Then, after reading the letter, he muttered

that if he did not come your worship might let out something that had better be kept quiet.'

'There is truth in what he said,' replied Lambourne, as if speaking to himself. 'My brain has played me its old trick.' And he went off, somewhat sobered, to prepare himself for Foster's arrival.

Meanwhile Giles Gosling went up to the room of the pedlar, who had suddenly retired on the arrival of the last two guests at the inn. This pedlar was none other than Wayland Smith, who had handed Tressilian's ring to the landlord as soon as he had arrived. Giles now came to tell him that Foster was coming to the inn, and that now was his opportunity to visit the lady at Cumnor Place. Wayland was doubtful, but Giles assured him that Lambourne in his present drunken state would keep Foster for an hour at least.

'Tell me one thing,' said Wayland; 'is that old man with Lambourne going up to Cumnor?'

'Surely, I think so,' said Giles. 'Their servant said he was to take their baggage there, but the ale has been too much for him, as the wine has been for Michael.'

'It is enough,' said Wayland, assuming an air of resolution—'I will thwart the old villain's plans.'

Shouldering his pack, he set out immediately, taking the most private way to Cumnor Place. An old woman opened the door when he knocked, and answered his petition to show his wares to the ladies of the house by a volley of abuse. She checked herself only when he slipped a small silver coin into her hand and promised her some stuff from his pack. She then told him to go into the garden, where he found the countess and her maid in an old garden-house.

The lady was too glad of this break in the monotony of her lonely life to heed Janet's remark that perhaps her father might not approve. Foster was not *her* father, she said, nor *her* master, and she summoned the pedlar and told

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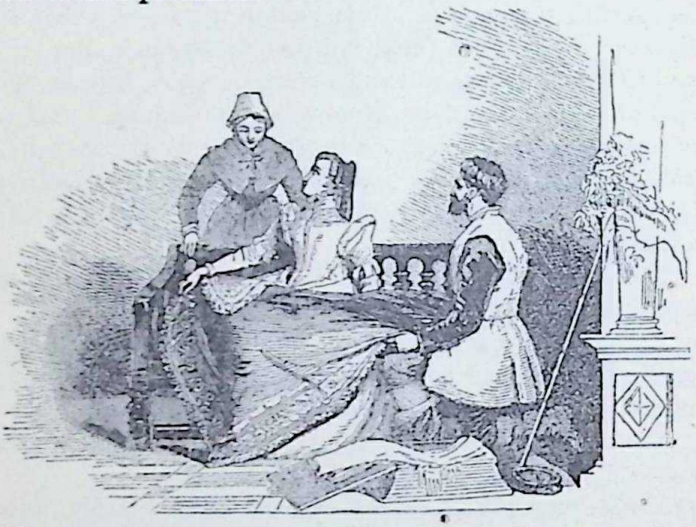
him to undo his pack, which he speedily did, commending his wares with all the skill of a practised trader.

The countess purchased some of the finer cloths for herself, not forgetting a present for Janet—a cherry-coloured cloak with gold buttons, which Janet feared was too gaudy for her—and some plain cloth for the other servants. She then turned her attention to the pedlar's collection of essences and perfumes.



WAYLAND SMITH SHOWING HIS WARES TO THE COUNTESS AMY AND TO JANET

'What is this paste so carefully kept in the silver box?' she asked.

'It is a remedy, madam, for a disorder from which I trust your ladyship will never suffer. It relieves the black vapours which are created in the body by that melancholy which broods on the mind. I have relieved many with it both in court and city, and of late one Master Tressilian, who had been brought into a state of melancholy which made his friends alarmed for his life.'

The lady remained silent for some time, and then with

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an effort at indifference said, 'Is the gentleman perfectly recovered?'

'Passably, madam,' said Wayland; 'he has at least no bodily complaint.'

'I will take the medicine, Janet,' said the countess. 'I too sometimes suffer from dark melancholy.'

When Janet protested that they had no guarantee that it was wholesome, Wayland swallowed some of it before them, and the countess thereupon bought what remained, and even took some of it on the spot. Then, flinging her purse to Janet, she told her to pay for the purchases, and walked into the house, as if tired of the amusement which the pedlar's visit had at first given her.

Deprived of the opportunity of speaking in private to the lady, Wayland hastened to speak to the maid. He told her that her mistress needed faithful service, and that he was a friend and not an ordinary pedlar as he seemed to be. Janet was at first alarmed and ordered him to be gone, but his protestation of friendship for her mistress and something honest in his looks induced her to listen further.

'This evening or to-morrow,' said Wayland, 'an old man will come here with your father. Beware of him. What mischief he meditates I cannot guess, but death and disease have always followed him. Say nothing to your mistress to alarm her, but see that she takes my medicine, for'—he lowered his voice and spoke impressively in her ear—'it is an antidote against poison.'

At this moment a sound of noisy mirth and loud talking approached the garden gate. Janet hid in the garden-house, while Wayland sprang into a thicket, as Foster with the astrologer and Lambourne entered the garden. The last, owing to the liquor he had by this time consumed, was in a state of frenzy, and the others were vainly trying to quiet him. He began to heap abuse upon Foster for not giving him a warmer welcome to his house.

'For God's sake,' said Foster, 'speak low. Come into the house and you shall have wine, or whatever you want.'

'No, I will have it here,' thundered the drunken ruffian; 'I will not drink with that poisoning devil indoors.' He raved further about poisons, and Tony Fire-the-Fagot, and Leicester, and Varney, and the mysterious lady of Cumnor Place. He was only quieted at last by being challenged to drink to the health of the Earl of Leicester. Without noticing that the cup handed to him contained not wine but distilled spirits, he drank it off, fell senseless to the ground, and was carried into the house.

Janet made her way unobserved into her lady's apartments, trembling like a leaf, but convinced by what she had heard of Lambourne's ravings that the pedlar's advice must be taken in earnest. Wayland, who now suspected that perhaps Leicester, and not Varney alone, lay behind the mystery of Cumnor Place, returned to the inn, but left it immediately to hide himself elsewhere in the neighbourhood, wishing to watch events more closely. He also desired to see Janet again, for he thought she looked much too charming and intelligent to be the daughter of such a rogue as Anthony Fire-the-Fagot.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COUNTESS IN DANGER

THE splendour of the approaching revels at Kenilworth was now the subject of conversation through all England, and it was very generally supposed that Queen Elizabeth was studying the time and opportunity for sharing her royal power with Leicester, her favourite, by marrying him. Meanwhile this dependent of fortune and the queen's favour was probably the most unhappy man in the realm. The character of the queen was well known to him. It was a mixture of the strongest masculine sense and those weaknesses which are

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chiefly supposed to belong to the female sex. Her subjects had the benefit of her virtues, but her courtiers often suffered from her caprices and her jealous temper. Great and wise statesmen like Burleigh and Walsingham were judged of by the queen only with reference to affairs of state, and her favour towards them rested on a sure foundation; but Leicester's success depended more upon her caprice as a woman.

'Men say', thought Leicester, 'that I might marry Elizabeth, and become King of England. It is sung in ballads, whispered in court, recommended from the pulpit. The queen herself has uttered no rebuke, while her words become more courteous, her actions more gracious, every day. Nothing seems wanting to make me king. And here I have letters from Amy begging me to acknowledge her openly. She speaks as if Elizabeth were to learn of this matter with the glee of a mother hearing of the happy marriage of a hopeful son. Elizabeth, to be tricked to the verge of acknowledging her love for a subject, only to discover him to be a married man!'

In his doubt and distress the earl sought Varney's advice more than ever. They anxiously consulted as to how the countess was to be produced at Kenilworth; and at last a decision had to be made.

'Show me your scheme, Varney,' said the earl, 'for solving the difficulty. I have tried by every means I could think of to put off these accursed revels, but to-day the queen said peremptorily that she would be at Kenilworth on Saturday, the ninth of July, and told me not to forget any of the appointed guests and suitors, especially Amy Robsart. She wishes to see the woman who could prefer you, Varney, to that poetical Tressilian.'

'Can my lady not be persuaded to bear my name for a brief space?' said Varney, after some hesitation.

'What, sir! my countess call herself *your* wife! That is against both my honour and hers.'

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'Yet such, my lord, Elizabeth thinks her; and to contradict this opinion is to disclose everything.'

'Think of something else, Varney; this plan is of no use. Even if I could give way to it, my wife would not. I know that neither authority nor entreaties would make her endure your name for an hour.'

Varney next suggested that some one might be found to represent her, and hinted that, to avoid detection, there were means of removing Tressilian. Leicester refused to listen to this dishonourable proposal; besides, he said there might be others at court who knew Amy.

'Well, my lord,' said Varney, 'your lordship is wise and honourable. But I should like to know whether all you have done for my lady should not make her willing to consider your safety.'

'I tell you, Varney,' answered the earl, 'that all it was in my power to bestow on her was a thousand times overpaid by her virtue and beauty.'

'Well, my lord,' said Varney with a mocking smile, 'you will have time enough to enjoy the society of one so gracious and beautiful—after such imprisonment as may be your punishment for deceiving Elizabeth Tudor.'

'Malicious fiend!' answered Leicester. 'Are you mocking me in my misfortune? Manage it as you will. Go yourself to Cumnor, and use your wicked eloquence.'

Varney willingly undertook the task of persuading the countess, but said he must have a letter from the earl as his credentials.

After several attempts Leicester at last penned a few distracted lines beseeching Amy for reasons concerning his life and honour to bear the name of Varney for a few days during the revels at Kenilworth. Varney, having thus brought the earl to the point he had desired, took the letter and departed immediately, throwing himself into the saddle without even waiting to put on other clothes, lest the earl should change his mind.

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As he rode along he considered what should be done if the countess refused to play the part assigned to her. 'Alasco must then do his part,' he thought. 'Sickness must serve her Majesty as an excuse for not receiving the homage of Mistress Varney—aye, and a sore and wasting sickness it may prove, should Elizabeth continue to cast so favourable an eye on my Lord of Leicester.'

Next morning Varney's arrival at Cumnor Place caused some bustle in that dull mansion. The countess sprang up at the clatter of horse's hoofs, exclaiming, 'It is Leicester! —it is my lord! Every stroke of his horse's hoofs sounds like a note of noble music.' Soon Foster entered to say that Varney had arrived with news from the earl and begged leave to speak with her ladyship instantly.

'Varney?' said the disappointed countess. 'Then it was not my lord! But he comes with news from Leicester, so admit him at once.'

Varney entered in the dress in which he had waited on his master at court, somewhat disordered by hasty riding during a dark night and through muddy ways. These signs alarmed the countess, who exclaimed, 'You bring me news from my lord—Gracious Heaven! Is he ill?'

'No, madam, thank Heaven,' said Varney; 'but his message is for your ear only.'

Janet and Foster were ordered to wait in the next room, where they stood anxious and suspicious as they heard the door shut and bolted from within. 'Pray, Janet, pray,' said Foster. 'I would pray myself, but I must listen to what goes on within. Evil has been brewing, love. God forgive our sins; but this sudden and strange arrival promises no good.'

Never before had Foster spoken to his daughter of anything that had happened in that mysterious household, and now his voice sounded to her like that of a screech-owl announcing some deed of terror and woe.

For some time all was still; then suddenly the voice of

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the countess was heard shouting indignantly, 'Undo the door, sir, I command you! I will have no other reply. Janet, alarm the house! Foster, break open the door—I am kept here by a traitor!'

But no violence was needed, for Varney himself unlocked and threw open the door. Janet and her father rushed in, and saw Varney standing by the door grinding his teeth with an expression of rage and fear on his face. The countess stood in the middle of the room, the veins on her forehead swollen, her cheek and neck crimson and her eyes flashing with anger. Janet ran to her mistress, while Foster said to Varney, 'What on earth have you done to her?'

'Nothing,' answered Varney in a sullen voice; 'nothing but communicate to her my lord's commands.'

'The false traitor lies,' said the countess. 'Look at him, Janet; he has the outside of a gentleman, and hither he came to persuade me that it was my lord's pleasure—nay more, his commands—that I should go with him to Kenilworth, and before the queen and nobles, before my own wedded lord, acknowledge him—*him* there, my lord's servant—for my husband. I will never believe that the noble Leicester approved of so dastardly a plan. Thus I tread on his infamy, if indeed he has done so, and destroy its remembrance for ever.'

So saying, she tore in pieces Leicester's letter, and stamped on them, as if she would annihilate the minute fragments.

'Bear witness,' said Varney, 'she has torn my lord's letter in order to accuse me of this scheme, as if I had any purpose of my own in it.'

'You lie, you treacherous slave!' said the countess, in spite of Janet's attempts to keep her silent. And then, recovering herself somewhat, 'Go, begone, sir,' she cried. 'I scorn you so much that I am ashamed to have been angry with you.'

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Varney left the room in silent rage, followed by Foster, who would not leave him without some explanation of the strange scene he had just witnessed. At length, when he had recovered command of himself, Varney said with his usual sneering laugh, 'It is of no use to deny it, Tony. The lovely but ill-tempered lady is convinced that I forged my lord's commands and invented the whole story. She thinks she has me in her power now, but she is deceived. Where is Alasco?'

Foster conducted him to the apartment where Alasco had set up his laboratory, and there the three betook themselves to secret council.

In the meantime the countess was describing to Janet the villany of Varney. 'I must fly from Cumnor,' she ended, 'but I do not know where I shall fly, or how; but God will not abandon me in this dreadful hour, for I am in the hands of wicked men.'

'Do not think so, dear lady,' said Janet; 'my father is stern and strict in his temper, and severely true to his trust, but yet'—— At this moment Foster entered the apartment bearing a glass and a small flask, and pressed the countess to taste of a choice cordial, which would refresh her spirits after her late alarm; but his hand trembled, his voice faltered, and his whole outward behaviour was so suspicious, that his daughter, after looking at him in astonishment for some seconds, walked slowly between him and her mistress, and taking the cup from his hand said in a low but decided tone, 'Father, *I* will fill the glass for my noble mistress when such is her pleasure.'

'You, my child?' said Foster apprehensively. 'No, it is not *you* that will render the lady this service.'

Taking the flask from his reluctant hand, Janet said, 'That which will benefit my mistress cannot do me harm. Father, I drink to you.'

Foster rushed at his daughter, and without a word snatched the flask from her, and stood glaring at her with

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a look of rage, fear, and convicted villany.' The courage of the countess had not given way during this dreadful scene, though her cheek had grown pale, and now she said calmly, 'Will *you* taste this cordial, Master Foster? Drink, sir, I pray you.'

'I will not,' answered Foster, and turning on his heel he left the room.

Janet looked at her mistress with shame and sorrow; then taking up her mantle she said, 'You said well that the God you serve will open up a path of deliverance. I have prayed night and day for light that I might see how to act between my duty to that unhappy man and that which I owe to you. There is a way of escape, and I must not shut the door which God opens. Do not ask me more. I will return soon.' And she withdrew from the room, intent on seeking Wayland's help.

Meanwhile Foster returned and reported his failure to his accomplices in the laboratory. 'Do you ask me to do murder in my daughter's presence?' said he. 'I am determined on one thing—that I will have one being in this place who may pray for me, and that one shall be my daughter. I have lived an evil life, but she is as innocent as she ever was in her mother's lap, and she at least shall not lose her hope of heaven.'

'Were you not told, you coward,' answered Varney bitterly, 'that no murder is intended, but only a brief illness? Discuss the matter with him, Doctor Alasco; I will be with you shortly.' So saying, Varney took the flask from the table and left the room.

He soon returned with the news that the lady had drunk the potion.

'Are you sure,' he said to Alasco, 'that you poured forth neither more nor less than the right measure?'

The astrologer assured him on this point, and he continued, 'Then I fear nothing. You were paid to create illness, and would think it poor business to do murder at

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the same price. Come, let us each go to our rooms. We shall see the result to-morrow.'

'What did you do to make her swallow it?' asked Foster, shuddering.

'Nothing,' said Varney, 'but gazed at her with that look which governs madmen, women, and children. The keepers at the great asylum in London told me that I had the right look for overpowering a troublesome lunatic. Good-night, my masters.'

CHAPTER XIV

FLIGHT FROM CUMNOR

LATE in the evening Janet returned to Cumnor Place, and found her mistress with her head resting on her arms and these crossed upon a table which stood before her. She had, indeed, drunk the poison, but fortunately not before Janet had persuaded her to take the rest of Wayland's medicine. The unhappy lady raised her head slowly and, looking at her maid with a ghastly eye, she said, 'Janet, I have drunk it. Varney was here when you were gone, and commanded me, with eyes in which I read my fate, to swallow that horrible drug. Oh Janet! it must be fatal; for a harmless drug was never served by such a cup-bearer!'

'God be praised that it is no worse,' said Janet. 'The poison you have swallowed cannot injure you, for the antidote was taken before it. I hastened here to tell you that the means of escape are open to you.'

'Escape!' exclaimed the lady, as she raised herself hastily in her chair, while hope returned to her eye; 'but ah! it comes too late.'

'No, dearest lady. Rise, take my arm and walk about. Do not let fancy do the work of poison!'

So saying, Janet made the countess rise and walk to and fro. Soon she began to feel better, and Janet asked,

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'Are you strong enough to hear the plans for your escape and make the effort?'

'I am,' answered the lady. 'The thought of leaving behind me that villain who threatens my life would give me strength to rise from my death-bed.'

With eager haste they collected a few necessaries, which Janet packed into a little bundle, not forgetting to add a small casket of jewels, which she wisely judged might prove of service. As they did so, Janet told the countess about Wayland, with whom she had arranged the means of flight, and who even then was waiting at the postern-gate of the park, and assured her of his honesty and trustworthiness. The countess, on hearing that he had been sent by Tressilian, declared her entire willingness to place herself in his charge; but she was distressed to learn that Janet was to remain behind in order to conceal her mistress's flight and thus prevent discovery and pursuit.

They found no difficulty in escaping unobserved from the house and garden, for all in the house had retired for the night, and they crossed the park in the moonlight without any alarm. The countess, indeed, looking back, saw a glimmering light and thought that she was being pursued; but Janet recognized that it was stationary, and came from the room where Alasco carried on his secret experiments.

As they drew near the postern-gate, Janet asked the countess if she would flee to the safety and protection of her father's house.

'No, Janet,' said the lady, 'I will not return there without my lord's permission and public acknowledgment of our marriage. I will go to Kenilworth and see these revels. When the Queen of England feasts in my husband's castle, the Countess of Leicester should be no unfitting guest.'

'I pray God you may be a welcome one!' said Janet hastily.

'Do you think I would disgrace him?' said the countess angrily, 'or do you suppose my lord capable of approving the base proceedings of your father and Varney, whose conduct I shall report to the good earl?'

'For God's sake, madam,' said Janet, 'spare my father, and let my poor services be some atonement for his errors!'

Resuming her tone of fondness and confidence, the countess assured her faithful attendant that she would not say a word against her father, and that she was going to Kenilworth only to throw herself on her husband's protection.

Janet could find nothing to urge against this course, for though she had not the same confidence in Leicester that her mistress had, she knew that at Kenilworth, if the countess chose to make her wrongs public, she might have Tressilian for her advocate and the queen for her judge; so much she had learned from Wayland. She recommended, however, the utmost caution in making her arrival known to her husband.

'Have you yourself been cautious?' said the countess. 'This guide, have you told him the secret of my marriage?'

'From me he has learned nothing,' said Janet; 'nor do I think he knows more than what the public in general believe of your situation.'

By this time they had reached the postern-door, beyond which they found Wayland Smith waiting anxiously for them. In reply to a question from Janet he said, 'All is safe; but I have been unable to procure a horse for the lady. Giles Gosling, the cowardly wretch, refused me one on any terms whatever. She must ride on mine, and I must walk by her side until I find another. There will be no pursuit if you, Mistress Janet, do not forget your lesson. Say to-morrow that the lady is unable to rise, and has an aching head and a throbbing at the heart; they will take the hint, and trouble you with no questions—they expect the disease.'

After tender farewells between the countess and Janet,

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the former was placed by Wayland upon his horse, and Janet said to him,

'May Heaven deal with you according as you are true or false to this most unhappy and most helpless lady!'

'Amen! dearest Janet,' replied Wayland; 'and believe me, I will so acquit myself of my trust as to make your eyes look less scornfully on me when next we meet.'

Janet made no reply, and disappeared through the postern-door, which she locked behind her, while Wayland, taking the bridle in his hand, began in silence their moonlight journey.

Although Wayland made what haste he could, their mode of travelling was so slow that dawn found them not farther than about ten miles from Cumnor. He cursed Giles and all smooth-spoken hosts. 'If the false knave had only told me plainly two days ago that I was not to reckon upon him, I could have done better myself. In so good a cause I would have thought little of stealing a horse—it could easily be returned.'

The lady endeavoured to comfort her guide, observing that the dawn would enable them to make more speed.

'True, madam,' he replied; 'but then it will enable other folk to take note of us, and I have been endangered before by the curiosity of the people of these parts.' But seeing he was making the lady uneasy and alarmed he strode on with an affectation of confidence, assuring her that there was no danger, while at the same time he looked sharply round to see that there was nothing in sight that might give the lie to his words.

A little later they were passing a small thicket of trees by the roadside, when they saw a stupid-looking fellow, seemingly a farmer's boy, holding a horse with a lady's side-saddle—the very thing that was wanted. He hailed Wayland with 'Sir, surely you are the party?'

'Yes, that I am, my lad,' said Wayland, and without an instant's hesitation he caught the rein out of the boy's

COUNTESS AMY'S ESCAPE FROM CUMNOR

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hand, helped the countess to dismount, and seated her on the new horse. Then, mounting his own, he threw a small piece of money to the lad and rode off. It was all done so naturally that the countess never suspected that it was not a pre-arranged plan.

Wayland rode on, congratulating himself upon his good luck, but they had not gone more than a mile when they heard a man's voice shouting behind them, 'Robbery! robbery! Stop thief!' In great alarm Wayland turned his head to see by whom he was chased, and was much relieved to discover only a single rider, whom even at a distance he recognized as Goldthred, the cloth-merchant. He came on at great speed, for his horse had taken the bit between its teeth, and he rode some distance past our travellers before he could stop. Pulling in his horse at last, he turned and in a menacing tone ordered Wayland to deliver up his horse.

'What!' said Wayland in a loud voice, drawing his sword; 'are we commanded to stand and deliver on the king's highway? Did you not, two days ago, in the 'Black Bear' Inn at Cumnor, threaten to rob me of my pack?' The cloth-merchant had indeed uttered some such wild threat. He was scarcely sober at the time, but Wayland did not scruple to remember his words against him.

'I spoke in jest, man,' said Goldthred; 'I am an honest shopkeeper and citizen who would scorn to do highway robbery.'

'But I made a vow to rob you of your horse, and a vow once made must be kept. All I can do for you is to leave the horse at Donnington at the nearest inn.'

'But I tell you, friend, that I need the horse now. I am to be married to-day; my bride has run away from her father's house, and stands yonder at the place where she should have met the horse. Would you have a bride walk to church on foot?'

'You may take her on the crupper with you,' answered

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Wayland; 'it will lessen your steed's mettle. If you do not find your horse at Donnington, you can take my pack—it lies at the 'Black Bear' with Giles Gosling.' So saying, he rode on cheerfully with the lady, while the merchant went back much slower than he came, wondering what excuse he should make to the disappointed bride.

At Donnington, which the travellers reached without further alarm, the countess rested for two or three hours, while Wayland took the merchant's horse to the appointed inn and made arrangements for the continuation of their journey. He procured another horse and also such change of clothing for the lady and for himself as gave them the appearance of country people of the better class. He learned from the landlord of the inn that a party of players were on the way to Kenilworth a short distance ahead of them, and when they set forth again at noon it was agreed that they should overtake and travel with this party, and that the countess should pretend to be the sister of her guide so as to attract less notice.

With this purpose they rode forward at a good pace, and came within sight of the players just as they were disappearing over the crest of a gentle hill. At this moment Wayland, who was keeping a keen watch on all sides, saw two horsemen, whom he recognized as Varney and Lambourne, following rapidly behind them. In great alarm they pressed forward up the hill as fast as their horses could trot, only refraining from putting them to the gallop in order to preserve the appearance of ordinary travellers and to avoid that of fugitives.

At the bottom of the valley beyond the hill they overtook the party of players, which had halted in great disorder. One of the party, Mistress Laneham, had been suddenly seized with illness and was being attended to in a roadside cottage by the other women. Wayland and the countess paused as if out of curiosity, and gradually mingled with the players, taking care to keep the group between them-

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selves and the approaching horsemen. Wayland did not perceive that his old friend Dickie Sludge was in the company, together with the schoolmaster, Erasmus Holiday, but Dickie recognized him at once.

Five minutes later Varney rode up to the party, and, learning who they were, asked why they loitered there when they should be making all haste to Kenilworth. Having been told the cause of the delay, he next asked, 'Who were those people, a man and a woman, who rode so hastily up the hill before me? Are they of your company?'

'If you please,' said Dickie Sludge, coming close up to Varney and speaking so as not to be overheard by his companions, 'the man takes the part of the devil in our plays, and went to fetch a woman-doctor of whom our distressed comrade stands so much in need.'

Varney and his companion, who had left Cumnor for Kenilworth without discovering the countess's flight, were satisfied with this reply and moved off.

'And now,' said the boy to Wayland, after they had ridden on their way, 'I have told them who you are, tell me in return who I am.'

'Either Flibbertigibbet,' answered Wayland, 'or else an imp of the devil. If you are going to Kenilworth I will go in your company as a juggler; I am used to the trade.'

'But who is the lady with you?' said Dickie. 'I think she *is* a lady, and I perceive by your fidgeting that you are in great trouble about her.'

'Oh, she is a poor sister of mine,' said Wayland, 'and can sing and play on the lute.'

Turning away, Wayland introduced himself to Master Holiday as a juggler, and the lady as a musician; and soon the whole company resumed their journey except Dame Laneham, who was left behind in the cottage.

Dickie Sludge was by no means satisfied with Wayland's explanation of the lady's identity, and pressed him with questions about her.

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'That sister of yours, Wayland,' he said, 'has a fair neck and a pretty tapering hand—faith, I'll believe in your relationship when the crow's egg is hatched into a swan.' At last, finding that Wayland would tell him nothing, he concluded, 'Well, all I say is this—remember you have kept a secret from me, and if I do not repay you my name is not Dickie Sludge.'

This threat and the fact that Dickie kept out of his way for the rest of the journey alarmed Wayland very much, and in order to be rid of him he persuaded the countess to stop at a small inn some two or three miles from Warwick, to which town the company passed on to spend the night.

'To-morrow, madam,' he said to her, 'we will, with your leave, again start early, and reach Kenilworth before the crowd who are to assemble there.'

CHAPTER XV

AMY AT KENILWORTH

THE unfortunate Countess of Leicester had left Cumnor with no idea in her mind except the necessity of fleeing from Varney and throwing herself on her husband's protection at Kenilworth. But now, when she was near her destination, a thousand doubts and dangers suggested themselves, aggravated by her lonely and helpless situation. A sleepless night left her so weak that she could not leave in the early morning as Wayland had proposed. It was not till nine o'clock that she summoned her guide and professed herself ready to go on; but he, alarmed for her health by the pallor of her face, advised her to remain at the inn till he should warn Tressilian of her presence.

'It must not be,' said the countess. 'I command you not to mention my unhappy name to him; it would double my misfortunes, and involve him in dangers beyond the power of rescue.'

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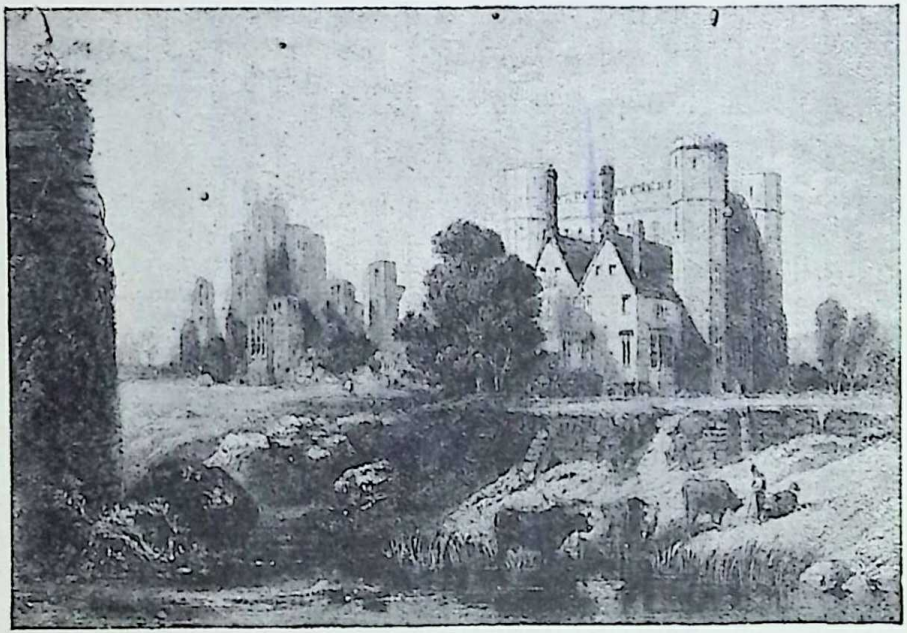
Seeing that she was determined, Wayland consented to get the horses ready, but entreated her to take some refreshment before she started. She made a vain attempt to swallow some food, but the smallest morsel seemed to choke her, and she set out on the final stage of her journey with no more refreshment than a cup of water. It was fortunate for the countess that her guide was well acquainted with the country, for the high roads were filled with herds of cattle, droves of sheep, and huge wagons loaded with casks of wine and ale and vast quantities of groceries and provisions, besides large crowds of all sorts and conditions of people, all wending their way to the castle of Kenilworth. He frequently turned from the direct road and led her by roundabout by-paths that allowed them to travel a considerable way with greater ease and rapidity and to avoid altogether the town of Warwick.

The crowd was on the whole a merry one, in spite of occasional brawls between quarrelsome wagon-drivers. The musicians played upon their instruments, the minstrels hummed their songs, and men laughed aloud as many a jest flew from lip to lip. The giddy scene distracted the thoughts of the countess from her own misery and from terrible anticipations of her fate; but now and again some reference in song or jest to the queen's favour for Leicester and the possibility of her marrying him affected her so visibly that Wayland thought she was turning ill, and besought her to pause and rest. Subduing her feelings, however, she insisted on proceeding to Kenilworth with all the haste they could make.

At length the princely castle appeared. An outer wall enclosed a space of seven acres, near the centre of which rose a huge pile of magnificent buildings of different ages and various styles of architecture. Beyond the external wall on the south and west sides lay a lake, partly artificial, across which Leicester had constructed a stately bridge, so that Elizabeth might enter by a way hitherto untrodden;



KENILWORTH CASTLE, AS IN 1816

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and the whole was surrounded by an extensive park full of deer and all kinds of game.

With what sad feelings did the Countess of Leicester first view the massive towers of her husband's lordly castle! She, at whose lightest word its gates should have flown open to receive her, could not conceal from herself the difficulty and peril which she must experience in gaining admission into her own halls. Approaching along the Warwick road she and her guide reached a gate that opened on an avenue stretching for two miles across the park to the newly-constructed bridge, along which the queen was to make her state entry into the castle. The gate was guarded by a body of the queen's mounted yeomen of the guard, who refused admittance to all except those who had the right of entry. A dense crowd surrounded the entrance, and Wayland was at a loss to know how to make his way through with his charge, and what excuse to offer in order to obtain admittance, when an officer of the earl's household, catching sight of him, exclaimed to his great surprise, 'Guard, make way for the fellow in the tawny orange cloak. What on earth has kept you so long?'

The guard speedily made a clear passage for him, so, cautioning his companion to keep her face veiled, he led her horse forward through the gate and proceeded along the broad avenue. They had not gone far when Wayland gave a cry of surprise, as some one dropped out of an oak-tree on to his horse and seized him from behind with a pair of long thin arms.

'This must be Flibbertigibbet again!' said Wayland, struggling to free himself. 'Do Kenilworth oaks bear such acorns?'

'In truth they do,' replied Dickie, 'and many others too hard for you to crack without my help. How could you have passed the gate yonder, if I had not warned the officer that our principal juggler was to follow us?'

But this was not the only service for which Wayland was

indebted to Flibbertigibbet. At the end of the avenue the approach to the bridge was guarded by a tower built over the road. In the archway stood a gigantic porter, clad in a tight-fitting suit of scarlet velvet that left the greater part of his legs and arms bare. The skin of a huge black bear was thrown over his shoulders in place of a cloak, and he was armed with a heavy club spiked with steel. This giant was striding to and fro at his post in a manner that indicated some anxiety and vexation, scratching his huge shaggy head and muttering to himself.

'Stand back,' he shouted in a thundering voice as Wayland tried to pass him, and he dashed his steel-shod club on the ground with such violence that it flashed fire. Wayland, remembering the success of Dickie Sludge's plan at the outer gate, began to explain that he was one of the company of players, but the porter would not listen, and went on muttering to himself in the same agitated manner as before.

'Stand still,' said Dickie to Wayland; 'I know what ails him.' Dropping from the horse, he plucked the giant by the tail of his bearskin, so as to induce him to bend down his head, and whispered something in his ear. The effect was magical. Throwing his club on the ground the porter caught Dickie up into the air and shouted, 'It is so, my little Tom Thumb—but who could have taught it to you?'

'Never mind about that,' said Dickie, and he drew the giant's attention to Wayland and the lady, who were still waiting for admission.

'In with you—in with you,' said the porter, 'but take care not to come late another day.'

'Aye, in with you,' added Dickie; 'I must stay a little while with my honest giant here, but I will be with you soon, and be at the bottom of all your secrets, though they be as deep and dark as the castle dungeon.'

Wayland and the countess passed through the archway and across the bridge, and entered without further obstruction

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the great outer court of the castle. There they paused some moments, not knowing whither to proceed, till a gaily-dressed servant crossed the court.

'Stop, sir,' said the countess; 'I desire to speak with the Earl of Leicester.'

'What madwoman is this,' said the fellow, 'that asks to see my lord on such a day as the present? I must summon his lordship from the queen's presence to do *your* business, must I? I should get whipped for my pains. I wonder the porter let you in; but his brain is touched through getting his speech by heart.'

A few other servants, attracted by the mocking tone of this speech, stopped to see what was happening. Wayland hastily addressed the one who appeared most civil, and, thrusting a piece of money into his hand, asked for his assistance in finding a temporary retreat for the lady. This person, who happened to be one with some authority, rebuked the other for his insolence, and having ordered the strangers' horses to be taken care of, asked them to follow him. The countess was wise enough to see that her chance of accomplishing her object lay in complying with his request.

They entered the inner court of the castle by the great gateway, and were conducted to a small but strong tower in the north-east corner of the building. The lower part of this tower was occupied by some of the household officers of Leicester; but in the upper story, which was reached by a narrow winding stair, was a small octagonal chamber, which had been fitted up for the reception of a guest. The officer courteously asked Wayland whether he could do him any further service, and upon receiving a hint that some refreshments would be acceptable, he led him to the place where they could be procured.

Meanwhile the attention of the countess was caught by the sight of writing materials placed on a table, which instantly suggested the idea of writing to Leicester and

remaining private until she had received his answer. She had written the letter by the time Wayland returned with such provisions as he thought would be acceptable to her.

'Good friend,' she said to him, 'the last trouble that I beseech you to take for an unfortunate lady is to deliver this letter to the noble Earl of Leicester. Give it, I pray you, into his own hand, and note how he looks on receiving it.'

Wayland accepted the commission, and left her after begging her to partake of some refreshment and advising her to lock the door and not to stir from the apartment. He resolved, however, to carry out the task in his own way. Ignorant of the lady's relationship to Leicester, her request to deliver a letter to the earl, the patron of her enemy, Varney, only convinced him that the difficulties of her situation had affected her understanding. He determined, therefore, to seek out Tressilian. 'He will be a better judge than I am,' he thought, 'whether she is to be gratified in this notion of appealing to Leicester, which seems like an act of insanity; and therefore I will hand the matter over to him, receive what he chooses to give me as reward, and say good-bye to Kenilworth and its revels, for it is no safe place for me.'

CHAPTER XVI

A LETTER LOST

By cautious inquiries Wayland learned that Tressilian had probably arrived that morning in the train of the Earl of Sussex, whom Leicester had received with marks of formal respect and distinction. The two earls, with many other nobles, knights, and gentlemen had afterwards ridden to Warwick for the purpose of escorting the queen to Kenilworth. Her Majesty's arrival had been delayed, because she had halted at Warwick to receive the homage of the

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citizens, and a messenger had come with the news that it would be evening before she entered the castle. So Wayland stationed himself near the gate by the bridge and carefully watched all who passed.

He had been standing there for some time when he felt his sleeve pulled, and looking down he saw Dickie Sludge.

Concealing his annoyance, he exclaimed, 'Ha! is it you, my little mouse? Tell me, how did you come off with that stupid giant at the gate?'

'Aye,' said Dickie, 'I am the mouse which gnawed the net, just when the lion who was caught in it began to look like an ass. As for the giant, I observed from his mutterings that his gigantic brain was overtaxed with trying to remember something which had been prepared for him to recite. I recognized it as a speech written by Master Holiday, from whom I had heard it often enough to remember it by heart; so I promised him, as the price of your admission, to prompt him in his hour of need, if he would hide me under his bearskin. But tell me this lady's story, for she is no more a sister of yours than I am?'

'Why, what good would that do you? But, Dickie, I will tell you all I know of her one day.'

'Aye!' said Dickie, 'and that day is perhaps nearer than you think. Fare you well, Wayland. I will go to my friend the giant, who at least is grateful for a service rendered to him.' So saying, he turned a somersault through the gateway and was out of sight in an instant, leaving Wayland all the more anxious for Tressilian's arrival, that he might hand over to him all responsibility for an affair that was becoming too complicated to manage.

Tressilian had gone with the Earl of Sussex to Warwick, with some hope of finding Wayland there; but failing in this, and anxious to avoid Varney, who seemed to draw near with the purpose of speaking to him, he rode back to Kenilworth by a roundabout way and entered the castle by a side gate, thus missing Wayland.

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In a melancholy mood, which contrasted strongly with the gaiety and bustle of his surroundings, he found his way to the apartment that had been assigned to him, and was surprised to find it locked. Opening it with the key that had been given to him, he was so astounded to see Amy Robsart within that he thought at first it must be an apparition. With no less astonishment the countess started up, exclaiming, 'Tressilian! Why have you come here?'

'Nay, why have you come here, Amy,' replied Tressilian, 'unless it be for aid, which I, at least, shall willingly render?'

'I require no aid, Tressilian. Believe me, I am near one whom the law and his love oblige to protect me.'

'If Varney protects his wife, it is not through respect of the law,' said Tressilian.

'Varney's wife!' she replied scornfully. 'Do you dare to address with that base name the—the—?' She was on the point of saying 'the Countess of Leicester,' but remembering that this would betray the secret on which her husband had assured her that his fortune depended, she was silent, and tears rose to her eyes.

'Alas! Amy, your eyes contradict your words,' said Tressilian. 'Why was not proper provision made for your reception? Why are you here, alone, in my apartment?'

'In *your* apartment?' repeated Amy, and she hastened towards the door. 'Alas! I had forgotten—I do not know where to go!'

'You do need aid—you do need protection, though you will not own it,' said Tressilian. 'I will instantly find Sussex and persuade him to bring you before Elizabeth.'

'Not for all the world!' exclaimed the countess in much alarm. 'Tressilian, you used to be generous. Grant me but one request—wait only for four-and-twenty hours. I am now awaiting the commands of one who has the right to give them. The interference of a third person—of you especially, Tressilian—will be ruin, utter ruin to me. Wait but for four-and-twenty hours; surely you can be patient

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for so short a time. After that you are free to act on my behalf as you think fit.'

Tressilian paused, weighing various probabilities in his mind, and finally, considering that she could come to no harm in a castle honoured with the queen's presence and filled with her guards and attendants, he promised on his honour that he would not intrude in her affairs for the time agreed upon.

Leaving to the countess the use of his apartment, Tressilian had descended only a few steps of the winding stair, when, to his surprise and displeasure, he met Lambourne, wearing an impudent smile. Tressilian would have passed him with a haughty refusal of acquaintance, but Lambourne had been partaking too freely of the wine which the hospitality of the day had put at his disposal to be abashed, and asked, 'Who is the lady, Master Tressilian, to whom you have lent your room?'

'I do not know what you mean,' said Tressilian, though he saw that Lambourne knew something of his secret; 'but if you are in charge of these chambers, here is a fee to leave mine unmolested.'

'Um!' muttered Lambourne, pocketing the gold as Tressilian passed on; 'this is my fee; but if I am to keep his secret, he might have looked more kindly upon me. I may have him in my power by this lucky discovery, and I will have a look at this hidden lady.'

Tressilian walked into the outer court of the castle, anxiously thinking over the situation of the unhappy lady whom he still loved devotedly, and wondering if he had been wise in giving her his promise, when he was suddenly accosted by Wayland with, 'Thank God, your worship is here at last!'

Wayland poured into his ear the story of the lady's escape from Cumnor and arrival at Kenilworth, and his own anxiety at the danger of remaining in the castle. 'It is not my purpose,' he said, 'to stay an instant after the delivery of this letter to Leicester. I only wait for your orders to take it to him. See, here it is—but no—a plague on it—I must

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have left it in the hay-loft, where I am to sleep. I will fetch it in an instant.'

'Do so at once,' said Tressilian in a fury; 'if you have been faithless and lost it, a dead dog would be better off than you.'

Wayland went off with apparent confidence but with real dread and confusion. The letter was lost, that was certain. It might fall into wrong hands, and cause the discovery of the whole intrigue in which he had been engaged. He saw nothing but more danger to himself as the consequence; even Tressilian had threatened dreadful punishment for the loss of the letter. Only pity for the unfortunate lady prevented him from escaping immediately. 'I will go to her room and tell her of its loss,' he thought, 'so that she may write another if she please; but she must find another messenger. I leave her to God and her own guidance, and to Master Tressilian's care. Perhaps she will give me a reward—I have well earned it—but let the reward go! I will not show a base spirit in the matter.'

Stealthily he made his way towards the countess's chamber, and he was cautiously creeping up the stair when a door suddenly burst open and Michael Lambourne rushed out upon him, shouting, 'Who are you? and what do you want in this part of the castle? March into that chamber.'

Wayland at first refused to obey. But Lambourne summoned a huge ill-looking fellow upwards of six feet high, who had been concealed by the door, and said, 'If you do not wish to visit the dungeon at the foundation of this tower, come in here and tell me who you are.'

Seeing that resistance was useless, Wayland said that he was a poor juggler, and had come to see his sister who was in Master Tressilian's chamber.

'Aha!' said Lambourne; 'sister or no sister, you will not have the chance of giving her a hint to steal away. Be off, and you will die on the spot if you come prying to this tower again. And now I think of it, I will

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see you out of the castle myself, for there is more than your jugglery in this matter.'

'But, please your worship,' said Wayland, 'I am to play a part in the pageant on the lake this very evening!'

'I will play it myself,' said Lambourne. 'Come along, you rascal, follow me. Or stay—Lawrence, do you bring him along.'

His companion, Lawrence Staples, head warder of the castle dungeons, seized the unresisting juggler by the collar of his cloak, and pushed him along, while Lambourne with hasty steps led the way to the nearest door in the castle wall. Wayland in vain racked his brain for some plan to help the poor lady, but when he was thrust out of the gate and told that instant death would be the result of his return, he raised his hands and eyes to Heaven, turned his back on the proud towers of Kenilworth, and went his way to seek a humbler and safer place of refuge.

Returning to the tower, Lambourne gave Lawrence strict injunctions to keep a close watch on the hidden lady. 'Let Tressilian speak to her if he will,' he said, 'but let no one come out. If the lady herself would leave, scare her back with rough words—she is only a paltry actress after all.'

The two then betook themselves to the wine-bottle, and after liberal potations Lambourne left in order to be present at the queen's reception and to play the part he had promised in the pageant on the lake.

CHAPTER XVII

THE QUEEN HEARS THE CASE

TRESSILIAN had remained for some time where Wayland had left him, uncertain what he ought to do next, when Raleigh and Blount came up to him. Greeting his friends, he asked them whence they had come.

'From Warwick,' said Blount. 'We had to come and

change our clothes, like poor actors that have to play several parts in one drama.'

'The queen loves such marks of deference,' said Raleigh. 'But look at Blount and see how his villanous tailor has clothed him—in blue, green, ând crimson, with purple ribbons, and yellow roses on his shoes!'

'Why,' said Blount, 'I told the rascal to do his best and spare no cost, and I think these things are gay enough,—gayer than your own. Let Tressilian judge between us.'

Raleigh was dressed in a rich suit that showed elegant and refined taste; in comparison with it, Blount's looked like that of a peasant dressed in gaudy holiday finery; but, to keep the peace, Tressilian gave his decision that Blount's dress was the finest, and Raleigh's the best cut.

'But why are you not in court dress?' asked Raleigh.

'I am excluded from my room by a silly mistake,' answered Tressilian, 'and I was about to beg a share in your lodging. But in any case I can stand behind you, Blount; your size and gay clothes will make up for my defects.'

Raleigh readily granted Tressilian's request, while Blount, much pleased with the praise of his finery, cocked his hat and glanced with complaisance at his crimson stockings and the yellow roses that bloomed on his shoes.

As the time of the queen's approach was drawing near, they joined a body of gentlemen who passed across the bridge and took their station at the entrance-tower. These gallants were all gaily dressed, and nothing was to be seen but velvet and cloth of gold and silver, ribbons, feathers, gems, and golden chains. Tressilian could not help feeling that his plain riding-suit was out of place and attracted unwelcome attention.

The sun had set, and a vast crowd beyond the entrance to the park had been waiting for some hours for the queen's arrival, impatiently, but in great good humour, owing to the profuse distribution of food and drink that the Earl of

Leicester had ordered. Suddenly a single rocket shot up in the evening sky, and the crowd became silent.

'They are coming now for certain,' said Raleigh. 'The procession will pause at the gate of the park, where prophetic verses will be recited telling the queen's fortune. Her Majesty is getting tired of these poetical compliments. At the reception in Warwick she whispered to me that she had had enough of them.'

'The queen whispered to *him*!' said Blount. 'Good heavens, to what will this world come?'

A shout of applause rose from the multitude, that made the country echo for miles around. It was repeated by the guards that lined the road up to the castle walls, while drums beat, trumpets blared, and the artillery on the battlements thundered a welcome. Mounted on a milk-white horse, upon which she sat with a stately dignity befitting the descendant of a royal race, the queen rode along the avenue. She was followed by a brilliant cavalcade lit up by two hundred waxen torches in the hands of as many horsemen. Leicester, on a jet-black charger, rode bare-headed on her right hand, glittering like a golden image with jewels and cloth of gold; but, proudly conscious as he seemed to be of the honour the queen was conferring upon him, his pale face caused some of his personal attendants to fear for his health. Behind them came a long train of lords and ladies—the highest-born nobles, the fairest beauties, and the wisest counsellors of that illustrious reign.

The queen drew near the tower that guarded the approach to the bridge, and now was the time for the giant porter to play his part in the ceremony of welcome; but the immense draught of ale which he had just taken to quicken his memory had only confused his brain, so that, groaning piteously, he remained sitting on his stone seat. The queen might have passed on without greeting, had not Flibbertigibbet, who lay concealed behind him, thrust a pin into his back and caused him to leap forward with a yell, brandishing

I complied with your request

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his club. Thus startled into action, he went on with his part. At the sight of the queen he dropped his club, as if struck by some heavenly vision, and, not without much prompting from Dickie, recited in a stentorian voice some verses giving welcome and free passage to the Goddess of the night.

Graciously accepting the homage of the giant warder, Elizabeth rode on through the archway to the bridge that crossed the lake, where another spectacle was provided. A raft, so arranged as to resemble a floating island, lighted by many torches, and surrounded by gods of the seas and rivers sitting on sea-horses, appeared on the surface of the lake, and gently glided towards the farther end of the bridge. On it stood a beautiful woman, clad in strange antique fashion, who, as the islet touched the shore just when the queen reached the end of the bridge, announced herself as the Lady of the Lake, renowned in the stories of King Arthur. Never, she said, since those ancient days had she had cause to raise her head from the waters that hid her crystal palace, but now she came in homage and duty to welcome the peerless Elizabeth to the freedom of her dominion. The queen accepted the address graciously and replied in jest, 'We thought this lake belonged to our own dominions, fair lady, but we will gladly at some other time talk with you further concerning our joint interests.'

Now was the time for Lambourne to play the part he had taken over from Wayland, and which with drunken assurance he had persisted in playing. He paddled forward in the guise of a sea-god, riding on a dolphin, but having never learned his speech, he made impudence supply its place, and, tearing off his mask, said that he was no sea-god, but honest Mike Lambourne, who had been drinking her Majesty's health since morning and had come to bid her a hearty welcome to Kenilworth Castle.

Elizabeth laughed heartily and declared he had made the best speech she had heard that day. Lambourne, who instantly saw that his jest had saved him, jumped on shore,

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gave his dolphin a kick, and swore that he would never meddle with fish again, except at dinner.

Amid a brilliant display of fireworks the queen entered the building, and moving forward through more pageants of ancient gods and heroes, at last reached the great hall of the castle, which was hung for her reception with the richest silken tapestry and filled with the strains of soft music. The Earl of Leicester conducted her to a royal throne that had been erected at one end of the hall. Kneeling before her, he kissed the hand she held out to him, and thanked her in terms of the deepest gratitude for the highest honour a sovereign could render to a subject. Then standing beside the throne he explained the preparations that had been made for her entertainment, and begged her permission for himself and the nobles who had accompanied her upon the journey, to retire for a few minutes and put themselves into more fitting attire.

This permission being given, Elizabeth cast her eye over the remaining gentlemen, and soon singled out Raleigh and a few others personally known to her, and made them a sign to approach. In reply to her questions as to the names and rank of the others, Raleigh gave the information she wanted, mingled with some humorous satire which amused her.

'And who is that clownish fellow?' she said.

'A poet, if it please your Grace,' replied Raleigh.

'I might have guessed that from his careless dress,' said Elizabeth. 'I have known some poets so thoughtless as to throw their cloaks into the mud.'

'It must have been when the sun dazzled both their eyes and their judgement,' answered Raleigh.

Elizabeth smiled.

'But you have not told me his name,' she said.

'Tressilian is his name,' said Raleigh, reluctantly.

'Tressilian!' said Elizabeth; 'and where is the other lover, for whom the lady gave up this same poet?'

With still greater reluctance Raleigh had to point out

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THE EARL OF LEICESTER, WITH HIS SIGNATURE

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Varney, whose outward appearance at least presented a favourable contrast to that of Tressilian.

At this moment Leicester reappeared, clad in a court dress of white silk and velvet, ornamented with silver and pearls, and the other nobles soon followed in rich attire.

'We have a piece of royal justice to attend to, my lord,' said the queen. 'It is the matter of Varney and Tressilian. Is the lady here?'

'Gracious madam, she is not,' answered Leicester, and seeing Elizabeth knit her brows, he went on, 'Your royal orders would have been obeyed, but Varney will tell your Grace why the lady' (he could not utter the words *his wife*) 'cannot be present.'

Varney advanced and pleaded, what indeed he firmly believed, that the lady was too ill to come to Kenilworth. In support of his statement he produced the written testimony of Alasco, whom he described as a learned physician, and of Anthony Foster, the gentleman in whose house she was then staying. This evidence satisfied the queen, and out of pity for Tressilian she proceeded to offer him advice and comfort.

'Asking your Majesty's pardon,' said Tressilian hastily, 'I say that these certificates do not speak the truth.'

'How, sir,' said the queen impatiently, 'do you doubt my Lord of Leicester's word? Examine these certificates yourself, and say what reason you have to disbelieve them.'

Remembering his promise to Amy, and resolved to keep his word at all costs, Tressilian could not declare her presence in the castle as a clear proof of their falsehood. In great perplexity he turned the papers over and over in his hands, as if he were unable to read them, till finally he said, 'Madam, your Grace calls upon me to admit evidence which ought to be proved true by those who use it in their own defence.'

The queen called upon Leicester for evidence of the genuineness of the certificates, and Varney at once produced a young nobleman, a spendthrift who had borrowed money from Foster, to testify to his signature; while Masters, the

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queen's physician, acknowledged that he had more than once consulted Doctor Alasco as a man of great learning and hidden skill, though not in the regular course of practice, and added that he recognized his signature.

Tressilian knelt at the queen's feet, and implored her vehemently not to decide the matter hastily, but to grant him a delay of twenty-four hours, after which he would produce the strongest evidence that the certificates were utterly false. His vehemence impressed the queen, but his request, made in spite of the evidence offered, and his inability to give any reason for it, convinced her that his brain was distraught, and she ordered Raleigh to take his friend away.

Raleigh, who was somewhat of the queen's opinion, with Blount's help dragged Tressilian into an antechamber, just as he was again about to address the queen.

'The news of the lady's illness has upset his excellent judgement,' he said, 'but he will recover if he be kept quiet. Take him to my lodging, Blount, and do not let him come out, for if he offends the queen again she will find sterner keepers for him.'

'I thought he was mad,' said Blount, 'when I saw him in the queen's presence wearing those dirty riding-boots.' He led Tressilian away, and was with difficulty dissuaded from placing two of Sussex's men on guard over him, but finally contented himself with locking the door of the room, after he had seen him retire to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SCOUNDREL KNIGHTED

'It is sad,' said the queen, when Tressilian was withdrawn, 'to see a wise man's mind so pitifully unsettled. Yet it plainly shows us that his accusations were baseless. Therefore, my Lord of Leicester, we remember your petition on behalf of your faithful servant Varney, whom we

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will honour the more readily in order that the good old knight, Sir Hugh Robsart, may be reconciled to his son-in-law. Come forward, Richard Varney, and kneel down.' And touching the shoulder of the kneeling man with the sword which Leicester, holding it by the point, handed to her. she said, 'In the name of God and Saint George we make you knight. Arise, Sir Richard Varney.'

As the new knight rose and retired after a deep obeisance, the queen said, 'The remaining rites may be finished to-morrow in the chapel; but we intend to give Sir Richard Varney a companion in his honours, and to be impartial we will this time consult the Earl of Sussex.' That nobleman was accordingly asked to nominate some gentleman of merit from among his followers for a similar honour.

With more sincerity than wisdom Sussex named Tressilian, to whom he believed he owed his life. He was both a scholar and a gentleman, he said, and added after a pause, 'Only I fear the events of this evening——' and then he stopped.

'The events of this evening,' said Elizabeth, 'would prove us to be as mad as this poor brain-sick gentleman, should we choose this moment to do him honour.'

Tressilian's name being thus rejected, Sussex proposed that of Nicholas Blount, his master of horse. The queen shrugged her shoulders in disappointment, and the Duchess of Rutland, guessing that she had expected to hear Raleigh's name, hastened to beg that the ladies of the court might also be allowed to name a candidate. This prayer having been granted, the duchess said, 'In the name of these fair ladies present, I request your Majesty to confer the rank of knighthood on Walter Raleigh, whose birth, deeds of arms, and promptitude to serve the ladies with sword or pen deserve this distinction from us all.'

Smiling with pleasure, the queen summoned Raleigh forward and bestowed upon him the dignity of knighthood. Some delay occurred before the appearance of Blount, who

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had not yet returned from seeing Tressilian safely disposed of. Poor Blount was a good soldier and man of action, but no courtier, and on learning of the honour that awaited him he marched up the hall in an affected, ridiculous manner that was in keeping with the foppery of his dress and raised a smile from all beholders.

'Curse you!' whispered Sussex in his ear, 'can you not walk like a man and a soldier?' Blount started and stopped, but a glance at his finery restored his confidence and he marched on as before.

Elizabeth conferred on him the honour of knighthood with marked reluctance. As soon as he rose and retired, she said to the Duchess of Rutland, 'We women have sharper wits than those proud men. Of these three knights, yours is the only true metal for the stamp of chivalry. I fear Varney will prove a knave, and this clownish fool, Sir Nicholas Blount, must be sent to Ireland or Scotland or somewhere; he may be a good soldier in the field, but he is an ass at court.'

Soon afterwards Leicester conducted the queen, followed by her whole court, to the banqueting-hall, where preparations for supper had been made with a magnificence worthy of the occasion. Nothing of importance to our story took place there, and after the banquet every one retired to his private apartments.

Changing his splendid attire for a very modest and plain dress, Varney hastened to Leicester's chamber to offer his services as body-servant.

'What, Sir Richard!' said the earl, smiling, 'your new rank scarcely suits the humility of this attendance.' But he did not hesitate to accept the assistance which Varney eagerly rendered.

'There is not a man within the castle,' said the latter, 'who does not expect to see persons of a rank far superior to mine accounting it an honour to render you such service.'

'It might have been so,' said the earl with an involuntary sigh. 'Give me my gown; I will look out on the night.'

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Passing through a window, he stood upon a projecting balcony and gazed long and anxiously at the stars. Stretching his arms upwards, he silently invoked the heavenly bodies to say whether fate was leading him to lasting greatness or to hopeless ruin. Then he re-entered the room and asked, 'What did Alasco say of my fortune?'

'Alasco says that your favourite planet is rising, and that the adverse influence—he would use no plainer words—though not yet overcome, is evidently on the wane.'

'It is so,' said Leicester, looking at a paper of astrological calculations that Varney handed to him; 'the stronger influence will prevail and the evil hour pass away. I will go to bed; but stay with me while I compose myself to sleep. The bustle of the day has fevered my blood.'

Varney officiously assisted his lord to bed, and then sat down with his back to him and patiently waited for him to speak.

'And so, Varney,' said the earl, after waiting in vain for the other to begin, 'men talk of the queen's favour towards me. She is indeed a gracious mistress, but it is written, "Put not your trust in princes."'

'True,' said Varney, 'unless you can unite your interest and theirs into one.'

'I know what you mean, though you are so careful of your words,' said Leicester impatiently. 'You mean that I might marry the queen if I would.'

'Ninety-nine out of a hundred men throughout broad England think so,' replied Varney.

'Aye, but you know better; you know the obstacle that cannot be overcome.'

'It must be, my lord, if the stars speak true.'

'What, do you believe in the stars?' exclaimed Leicester.

'No, my lord, if you will pardon me; but I believe in many things that predict the future, and I believe in them none the less if they agree with the predictions of the astrologers.'

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'You are right,' said the earl, tossing himself on his couch. 'Everything points towards this marriage; it is hoped for both in England and abroad. Yet it is impossible.'

'I do not think so, my lord,' said Varney, 'for the countess is ill.'

'Villain!' said Leicester, starting up and seizing his sword; 'would you do murder?'

'For whom do you take me, my lord?' said Varney, with the air of an innocent man unjustly suspected. 'I merely said that the countess is ill. She is only mortal and may die, and your lordship will be free again.'

'Away! away! Let me hear no more of this,' said Leicester.

'Long live your fair countess, my lord,' said Varney; 'but I do not see why you may not be king of England notwithstanding. People in high places before now have contracted a double marriage, and kept the humbler alliance secret, and so may you. Leave me to find a secret retreat for the countess, which no jealous queen could penetrate.'

'I have heard of such things in other lands,' said Leicester meditatively; but finally he added with a sigh, 'It is impossible. Good night, Sir Richard.'

Varney was on the point of leaving the room when the earl recalled him to ask if he had any clue to the strange conduct of Tressilian in the queen's presence. Varney could offer no explanation, but informed the earl what Lambourne had told him, namely, that an unknown woman —some player's wife or sister, he thought—was occupying the room that had been allotted to Tressilian.

'Keep your eye on him, Varney,' said Leicester.

'It was for that purpose that I chose his lodging. Good-night, my lord,' said Varney, and he left the earl to his repose.

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CHAPTER XIX

QUEEN AND COUNTESS MEET

THROUGHOUT the noise and bustle of the day and the splendour of the queen's reception, the unfortunate Countess of Leicester remained in her apartment, or rather prison, sad and solitary, anxiously awaiting a reply to her letter. She knew that there might be difficulty in conveying it to Leicester, and that his attendance on the queen might delay his coming; but in spite of all her attempts to persuade herself of the impossibility of his speedy arrival, she started up at every sound on the stair, expecting to see him enter. But the weary hours dragged on, and no one came.

In the evening the display of fireworks and the bursts of music, that came not only from within the castle but from various points outside, distracted her attention, till the thought forced itself upon her that it was her husband who was the author of all this festivity, in the midst of which she remained an outcast—almost a captive.

By degrees the sounds of revelry died away, and the countess withdrew from the window at which she had sat listening to them. It was night, but the moon gave sufficient light to enable her to place the table across the door of the room. Warned by the ease with which Tressilian had entered, she did not trust the lock, and feared the entrance of some intruder. This done, she threw herself on the couch, but it was long past midnight before, from sheer exhaustion, she found the relief of sleep.

In the morning she dreamed that she heard her father's hunting horn sounding the note with which he was wont to announce his return from a successful chase.

In her dream, she ran to a window that looked into the courtyard at Lidcote Hall, which she saw filled with men

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in mourning garments. The old curate seemed about to read the funeral service. Mumblazen, dressed in the antique costume of a herald, held up a shield on which was painted a coat-of-arms surmounted by an earl's coronet. The old man looked at her with a ghastly smile, and said, 'Amy, are they not rightly drawn?'

Just as he spoke, the wild note of the hunting horn again reached her ear, and she awoke to hear a real bugle-note, sounded to remind the inmates of the castle that the day was to begin with a stag-hunt in the neighbouring park. The countess sprang up from her couch, but soon recollected with despair her unhappy position. 'He has not come; he does not think of *me*, while a queen is his guest!' she exclaimed.

At that moment the sound of some one attempting softly to open the door caused her to run to it in mingled fear and joy, and drag away the table. 'Is it you, Leicester?' she whispered.

'No, not quite Leicester,' said Michael Lambourne, pushing open the door, 'but as good a man.'

Lambourne, who had never seen the countess except at a distance, did not recognize her, for she was still wearing the disguise she had worn in her flight. The drunken fellow laid his hand on her arm, and the countess, in her fright, uttered shriek after shriek. Lambourne cared not for her shrieks, but they brought her unexpected help in the person of Lawrence Staples, who, drunk as he too was, came in time to save her from further insolence.

'Let go the woman,' he shouted. 'I'll have no one abuse my prisoners. Let her go, I say, or I'll brain you with my keys.' Lambourne turned and would have drawn his dagger to attack Lawrence, but the latter seized him by the arm, and the two were soon rolling on the floor in a close struggle, while the countess hastily escaped from the room and ran down the stairs.

Lawrence had succeeded in dashing his heavy keys into

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Lambourne's face, and Michael had grasped his opponent so violently by the throat that blood gushed from his nose and mouth, before officers of the household, attracted by the noise, rushed in and parted them. 'A plague on you both,' said one of the officers. 'What are you fighting here for, like a couple of curs?'

'We were fighting about a lady, if you must know.'

'A lady? Where is she?' said the officer.

Looking around, the two combatants were astonished to find that the cause of the fight had disappeared, and they slunk, crestfallen, back to their own quarters.

Meanwhile the countess had fled into a garden that she had seen from the window of her room, hoping to find a place of concealment among its numerous arbours, fountains, statues, and grottoes, where she could wait and watch for the return of Wayland, her guide, or some other chance of communicating with her husband. Entering a grotto, she happened to glance into a fountain that adorned it, and was shocked at her own image reflected on its surface. With a woman's care for external appearance, she made a hasty toilet, using the pool as a mirror, and arranged her dress in more becoming fashion.

It happened that Queen Elizabeth had risen early and had come out to enjoy the fresh morning air in the same garden, but in a distant part of it, beyond the view of the countess. There she was soon joined by Leicester, and the two walked up and down in intimate conversation. The court ladies in attendance kept at a respectful distance, but they did not fail to notice that Elizabeth's manner showed far more of womanly coyness and less of queenly pride and dignity than usual. It seemed that she listened with more than ordinary favour to the language of romantic gallantry with which she always loved to be addressed, until Leicester, spurred on by vanity or ambition or both, ventured to mingle with it words of love.

'No, Leicester,' said Elizabeth at last; 'ties that might

make a lowly maiden happy are denied to a sovereign, who must remain the mother of her people. Leave me, my lord, and delay the chase for half an hour. I wish to think.'

'Leave you, madam!' said Leicester. 'Has my madness offended you?'

'No, Leicester, not so,' answered the queen hastily; 'but it is madness, and must not be repeated. Go, and leave me in private a while.'

The earl bowed deeply and retired slowly with a melancholy air. The queen stood looking after him for a moment, and then turned and walked along the garden, quickly recovering her composure of mind and her usual air of royal dignity as she went. Reaching the grotto where the countess had concealed herself, she entered it, intending to spend some time in private meditation. When the countess saw a lady approach, her first impulse was to address her with a prayer for assistance, but a nearer view aroused a fear that this must be the queen herself, from whom her husband had been so determined to keep the knowledge of their marriage. She therefore remained standing still as a statue, with a bloodless cheek and a fixed eye.

'How now, fair nymph of the grotto,' said Elizabeth, after a pause of astonishment, 'are you spell-bound and struck dumb by fear? Speak, and we will break the charm.'

Without a word the countess fell on her knees, and clasping her hands gazed up at the queen with an agonized look of fear and supplication.

'What does this mean?' said Elizabeth. 'Stand up, maiden—what would you have with us?'

The countess, perplexed with the problem of securing her own safety without betraying her husband's secret, remained silent, till at last, in reply to the queen's repeated inquiries, she stammered out, 'Alas! I do not know.'

'This is folly, maiden,' said Elizabeth impatiently. 'The

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sick man must tell his malady to the physician; and *we* are not accustomed to repeat our questions without receiving an answer.'

'I request—I implore'—said the countess in a choking voice, 'I beseech your gracious protection—against—against one Varney.'

'Varney!' said the queen. 'What are you to him, or he to you?'

THE COUNTESS SEEKING PROTECTION WITH ELIZABETH

'I—I—was his prisoner—my life was in danger—and I fled for protection.'

'You shall have it—that is, if you are worthy. You are Amy, if I mistake not, the daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart. You deceived your old and honoured father, cheated Master Tressilian, and married this same Varney.'

'No, madam, no,' said Amy, springing to her feet. 'I am not the wife of that contemptible slave. I would rather die first.'

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'Then tell me, woman,' said the queen, her anger rising at the thought that perhaps she had been deceived, 'tell me—for I *will* know—whose wife are you? You had better play with a lioness than with Elizabeth Speak out at once.'

Carried away by the queen's vehemence, the countess said in despair, 'The Earl of Leicester knows it all.'

'The Earl of Leicester!' said Elizabeth in utter astonishment. 'Woman, this is a plot to slander the noblest lord and truest-hearted gentleman in England. Come with me instantly.' Seizing the countess by the arm, she hastened into the castle at such a speed that the poor lady could hardly keep pace with her.

They approached a group of lords and ladies that had assembled awaiting the queen's commands for the commencement of the hunting party.

'Where is my lord of Leicester?' said the queen in a tone that thrilled the courtiers with astonishment. 'Stand forth, my Lord of Leicester!' As the earl came forward she pointed to the pale face of the almost fainting countess. 'Do you know this woman?'

Leicester inwardly prayed that the castle might fall and bury him in its ruins as he bowed to the ground in silence.

'Leicester,' said Elizabeth in a voice trembling with passion, 'if your confusion means that you have tried to deceive me—me, your sovereign, then by all that is holy, your head is in as great danger as ever was your father's.'

Raising himself slowly, the earl replied with sullen pride, 'My head cannot fall but by the judgement of my peers, to whom I will appeal.'

Enraged at this defiance, Elizabeth would have had him instantly arrested for high treason, had not one or two of the older and wiser noblemen counselled patience and caution. The countess, too, when she saw the danger into which she had brought her husband, flung herself at the

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queen's feet and exclaimed, 'He is guiltless, madam—the noble Leicester is guiltless.'

At this appeal Leicester's better nature awoke and prompted him to make an open confession of his marriage and to proclaim himself the protector of the countess, but before he could speak Varney rushed in, and kneeling at the queen's feet, besought her to let justice avenge itself upon him, but to spare his noble and innocent master. Amy sprang to her feet with a faint scream, and prayed her Majesty to imprison her in the deepest dungeon rather than ask her to endure the sight of that odious villain.

The queen handed her over to the care of her own kinsman, Lord Hunsdon, with orders for her kind treatment but safe keeping. Then turning to Varney she said, 'Speak, Sir Richard, and explain these riddles.'

'Your Majesty has probably detected the cruel malady of my beloved lady, which, unfortunately, I would not allow the physician to enter in his certificate; but I cannot longer conceal that she is mad. She now shows the most intense hatred of those whom in her sane moments she loves the most. Master Foster has but now arrived to tell me of her escape from Cumnor. May I have your Grace's commands that my unfortunate wife be restored to the custody of her friends?'

Leicester started, but controlled himself with a strong effort, while the queen replied, 'Indeed it is as we thought; her whole demeanour bears it out. But you go too fast, Master Varney. We will first have a report from our own physician. You shall, however, have permission to see her in the meanwhile to make up your matrimonial quarrels.'

Varney bowed low and retired. The queen turned again towards Leicester and said with marked condescension, 'My Lord of Leicester, you are offended with us, and we have a right to be offended with you. We will take the lion's part upon us, and be the first to forgive.'

Leicester had been too deeply shaken to recover his com-

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posure at once,' but he managed to express gratitude for her kindness and to say that she had done him no injury that required forgiveness.

The queen seemed satisfied with his reply, and intimated her pleasure that the sports of the morning should proceed. Soon the bugles sounded, the hounds bayed, and the horses pranced, as the court departed for the appointed stag-hunt.

CHAPTER XX

THE EARL IS DECEIVED

It was not till the afternoon that Leicester found himself alone with Varney and learned the particulars of the countess's escape from Cumnor, as they had been reported by Foster, who had come post-haste with the news. Varney took especial care to be silent concerning those practices on the countess's health which had driven her to so desperate a resolution. And Leicester, who could only suppose that she had adopted it out of jealous impatience to be acknowledged as his wife, was not a little offended at the levity with which she had broken his strict commands, and exposed him to the resentment of Elizabeth. 'I have given', he said, 'to this daughter of an obscure Devonshire gentleman the proudest name in England. I ask of her only a little patience, but the infatuated woman will rather risk her own safety and mine, and forces me to a thousand devices that shame me in my own eyes.'

'All may yet be well, my lord,' said Varney. 'We may yet keep the marriage from Elizabeth's knowledge, if my lady will only obey and play the part that the time requires.'

'It is too true,' said Leicester; 'there is indeed no other remedy. I have already heard her called your wife in my presence. She must bear the title till she is far from Kenilworth.'

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'And long afterwards,' said Varney, 'for I cannot think it safe for her to be called the Countess of Leicester while the present queen lives.'

'I will go and speak with Amy,' said Leicester. 'Fetch me a servant's cloak. You have free access to her, and I will pass the sentinels as your servant.'

Varney would have preferred to go by himself, for he feared the revelations that the countess might make of his conduct, but the earl would not listen to his objections. They passed through a secret passage to Lord Hunsdon's apartments, and were admitted by the sentinel in charge to the room where the countess had been lodged.

'Oh, my lord! have you come at last?' exclaimed Amy, as she rushed to her husband and clung round his neck. When her first transports of joy had somewhat subsided, she said, 'Since last we met, my lord, I have been in sickness, in grief, and in danger, but now you have come, and all is health, and joy, and safety!'

'Alas! Amy, you have ruined me. You are here contrary to my express commands, and your presence endangers both yourself and me.'

'Then I will depart at once,' said the countess, 'but I would not willingly return to Cumnor Place.'

'You shall go to one of my northern castles, but it will be needful to go under the name of Varney's wife.'

'My Lord of Leicester! Is it to your wife you give such dishonourable counsel? I will not go with that man, unless by violence, and not even violence will make me call myself his wife.'

'It is but a temporary deception,' said Leicester; 'there is no other remedy—you must do what your own impatient folly has made necessary—I command you.'

'I cannot obey your commands, my lord, above those of honour and conscience. In this matter I will NOT obey you.'

'My lord,' said Varney, interposing, 'my lady is too

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much prejudiced against me; but perhaps she could persuade Master Tressilian to escort her to Lidcote Hall, where she might remain in safety till the present crisis be over.'

'Silence, Varney,' said Leicester. 'By heaven, Tressilian shall not be a partner in my counsels!'

'And why not?' said the countess, 'unless the counsels are not fit for a man of stainless honour.' Leicester stood irresolute and displeased, and the countess continued, 'You have spoken your mind, my lord, and unhappily I am unable to comply with your wishes. This person has hinted at another scheme, to which the only objection is that it displeases you. Will your lordship now hear what I, a young and timid woman, but your most affectionate wife, propose? All these dangers arise from the deceit and duplicity with which you have allowed yourself to be surrounded. Shake yourself free of them at once, like a true English gentleman, by following the path of plain truth and honour. Take your wife by the hand and acknowledge her before the queen. Then if law or power compel you to part from me, I will make no objection, and a broken heart will soon remove the life that bars your way to fortune.'

All that was noble and generous in Leicester's nature was stirred by this appeal. Scales seemed to fall from his eyes, and the duplicity and trickery of which he had been guilty stung him with remorse and shame. 'I am not worthy of you, Amy,' he said, 'but I will perform a bitter penance. It will be dangerous—the queen has already threatened to take my head—but I shall find means to make my confession as safe as may be.' He embraced her fervently and left the room, followed by Varney, who muttered to himself, 'Now either she or I must *perish*.'

Returning to his apartments, Leicester began to count the friends and relatives among the nobles upon whom he thought he might depend in the case of an open rupture with the queen.

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'Alas, my lord!' said Varney with a look of despondency, 'you are strong and powerful; yet, let me say it without offence, you are so only because of the queen's favour. If you declared against her, you would instantly find yourself deserted and outnumbered. Even in this very castle, in the midst of your own kinsmen and vassals, you would be a captive, should she please to say the word. Her throne is too firmly founded on the love and affection of the people to be overturned by a combination of powerful nobles.'

'I do not care,' said Leicester. 'Let my retainers be gathered in the main stronghold of the castle; let our gentlemen and friends go armed, as if fearing an attack from the party of Sussex, and let the townsmen take arms and be ready to overpower the yeomen of the guard.'

'It is an act of high treason that you order, my lord,' said Varney, and after a long pause he continued, 'Your marriage is the sole cause of the threatened breach with your sovereign. But before men risk their lives for a rich diamond, would it not be prudent to see that there is no flaw in it?'

'What does this mean?' said Leicester, fixing his eyes sternly on him. 'Remember you speak of the Countess of Leicester.'

'I do, my lord, but I speak for the welfare of the Earl of Leicester. I believe that from the beginning she has been in secret communication with Tressilian. It was just before he presented his supplication to the queen that I met him, to my astonishment, at the postern-gate of Cumnor Place. I drew my sword on him, and had my foot not slipped he would not have lived to trouble your lordship.'

Leicester seemed to be struck dumb with surprise, but at length he said, 'What further proof have you of this besides your own word?'

In reply Varney told the story of Lambourne's wager and visit to Cumnor Place, and Tressilian's interview with the countess. 'The countess', he said, 'pretended that the

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interview had been thrust upon her, but I have since learned that Tressilian did not leave the place without establishing a correspondence with the landlord of the 'Black Bear' for the purpose of carrying off the lady and taking her back to Devonshire, and later he sent down an agent, who in the disguise of a pedlar held conferences with her. This agent arranged for her escape by night, and brought her here, to this castle, where she found refuge in the apartment allotted to Tressilian.'

'It is false, false!' exclaimed Leicester with passion. 'Ambitious she may be—fickle and impatient; but capable of deserting me!—never, never. The proof—where is the proof of this?'

'Lambourne and the warder found her there this morning, but neither knew her for the countess, and she escaped. Your lordship will, however, recognize these things which she left behind her in the room.' He showed a glove that had belonged to the countess, and the casket of jewels that she had taken from Cumnor Place.

The sight of these objects threw the earl into a state of violent agitation, for he instantly recognized them and took them as proof of Varney's tale. 'Gracious Heaven!' he exclaimed, 'was it for this woman that I was about to imperil the lives of many noble friends, shake the foundation of a lawful throne, and raise rebellion in a peaceful land?' But the memory of the countess's last appeal returned to him, and he added in bewildered agony, 'Her looks and her speech were those of an honest and loving wife. May she not be innocent? Prove her so, Varney—your brain was always clear and piercing—and all I have done for you shall be as nothing to the recompense I shall give you.'

Even the hardened Varney was moved by the agony in his master's voice, but his own ambition spurred him on, and with diabolical skill, as if seeking to encourage the hope of the countess's innocence, he said, 'Yet why, if guilty, should she have imperilled herself by coming here,

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instead of to her father's or elsewhere?—though that might have interfered with her desire to be acknowledged as Countess of Leicester.'

'True, true, true!' said Leicester with the utmost bitterness. 'I see it all. She would have secured my ruin by disclosing my secret. The wealthy dower that the law would have given her on my death, as the Countess of Leicester, would have been an ample fortune for the beggarly Tressilian. For this she has been goading me on to danger! Do not speak for her, Varney. She is doomed!' Tearing open the casket he threw the splendid contents on the floor and stamped upon them in his wrath; then he rushed out of the room.

For a little time Varney busied himself with gathering up the jewels and placing them in the secret drawer of a cabinet which he knew of, and then at his lord's call followed him into the adjoining room, where they remained for an hour in close consultation.

CHAPTER XXI

AN INTERRUPTED DUEL

When later in the day Leicester and Varney rejoined the revels of the court, it was noticed that their bearing was very different from their usual demeanour. Varney mingled with the younger courtiers and ladies, and wore an air of light-hearted gaiety, while Leicester moved about with a clouded brow and talked in a forced and absent-minded way that contrasted strongly with his usual grace of manner and charm of conversation. To the surprise of every one he avoided the immediate presence of the queen, but Elizabeth, instead of resenting his neglect, was inwardly flattered by the thought that it was due to apprehension of her displeasure, and gave him time to regain his confidence. Her patience, however, had almost reached its

limit, when Leicester approached her and requested permission to absent himself for a brief space on business of importance. 'Go, my lord,' she said. 'We are aware that our presence must cause unexpected needs which require to be provided for on the instant. Yet, my lord, if you would have us believe ourself a welcome guest, we beg that you will favour us with more of your presence than we have to-day enjoyed. We trust to see you return with an unwrinkled brow and that gaiety which you are wont to show to your friends.'

Leicester merely bowed low and retired. At the door he was met by Varney, who whispered in his ear, 'All is well.'

'Has Masters, the physician, seen her?' said the earl.

'Yes, my lord; and as she would not answer his questions nor give any reason for her refusal, he will bear testimony to her madness. We can therefore remove her as we proposed.'

'But Tressilian?' said Leicester.

'He will not hear of her departure for some time. To-morrow he shall be cared for. Trust him to me.'

'No, by Heaven, Varney!' said Leicester. 'No; rather than forgo the right of doing justice with my own hand on that villain, I will unfold the whole truth to Elizabeth, and let her vengeance fall at once on them and on me.' While he spoke his eyes shot fire and his lips trembled with passion.

Varney saw with alarm that his lord was wrought up to such a pitch of passion that he was quite capable of adopting this desperate course. 'Be yourself, my noble master,' he said; 'be yourself, superior to those storms of passion which wreck inferior minds. Are you the first who has been deceived by a vain woman and cheated into an affection which was afterwards scorned and abused? Let your strong resolution of this morning, which I have both the courage and the means to execute, be like the sentence of a superior being, a passionless act of justice. She has deserved death—let her die.'

Be it so—she dies,' said the earl with a strong effort to be calm ; ' but Tressilian shall be my own victim.'

' It is madness, my lord ; but you are too mighty for me to bar the way to your revenge. Wait at least till a fitting time and opportunity. Meanwhile I must beg your signet-ring as a token to your servants at Cumnor that I may command them with your full authority.'

Having received the ring, Varney ventured to warn the earl that the queen had observed a strange alteration in his demeanour, and then departed to make his arrangements.

Leicester, with this warning fresh in his mind, re-entered the queen's presence, and made a resolute effort to assume his wonted spirits and gaiety, in which he succeeded so well that it became evident to all that he had regained the first place in the queen's favour.

The courtiers had assembled in the great hall, awaiting the appearance of a splendid mask, which was to close the day's entertainments, when the queen interrupted a lively passage of wit between Leicester, Raleigh, and some others with the words, ' We will impeach you of high treason, my lord, if you thus try to kill us with laughter. And here comes Masters with news that may make us all grave. Well, Masters, what do you think of the runaway bride ? '

The smile on Leicester's face froze as if it had turned into marble as he listened to the physician's reply. ' She is sullen, madam, and refuses to answer questions. I think she is suffering from some illusion, and that she had better be removed to her husband's house far from all this bustle of pageants, which disturbs her weak brain. She drops hints that she is some great person in disguise. Such fancies are common in these cases.'

' Nay, then,' said the queen, ' let Varney take her away forthwith. It is a pity that so fair a lady should have an infirm mind. But perhaps, my lord ' (she said to Leicester), ' you do not share our opinion of her beauty. Some men prefer a statelier form to that drooping, fragile one. I agree

with Rutland, who says that if my Lord of Leicester had such a bride, he would wish her dead before the end of a month.'

Leicester replied in a whisper that his love was more lowly than Her Majesty deemed, for it was settled where he could never command but must ever obey.

The queen blushed, and bade him be silent; yet she looked as if she did not expect him to obey her command. However, the entrance of the maskers with a flourish of trumpets spared Leicester the effort of uttering more falsehoods and doing further violence to his conscience. With the maskers a crowd of menials and others of the lower classes thrust themselves into the lower part of the hall, and the officers of the household had some difficulty in driving them back. Elizabeth, with her usual consideration for the common people, requested that they might be permitted to remain to witness the pageant, and Leicester seized the opportunity to leave her presence. He went to the other end of the hall, and having reduced the crowd to order by a look, he remained standing there throughout the mask.

The scenes which were now presented for the amusement of the queen showed the four chief nations with which the history of ancient England is concerned, namely, the aboriginal Britons, the Romans, the Saxons, and the Normans, in various activities of peace and war, which need not be described here. When the pageants, the music, and the dances had ended, and the crowd had begun to leave the hall, Leicester felt himself pulled by the cloak, and a voice whispered in his ear, 'My lord, I desire to speak with you.'

Leicester's troubled mind started with alarm at these simple words, as he turned and saw a man in plain dress with a black mask over his face. 'Who are you, and what do you want with me?' he said.

'Edmund Tressilian, of Cornwall,' was the reply. 'I wish to speak with you on a matter that concerns your honour. My tongue has been bound by a promise for four

and twenty hours, but I now do your lordship the justice of addressing myself to you.'

The earl thrilled with astonishment at the sound of the detested name, but suppressing all signs of agitation he answered, 'And what does Master Tressilian want from me?'

'Justice, my lord,' said Tressilian, calmly but firmly. 'May I wait on you in your chamber?'

'No,' answered Leicester sternly. 'Meet me in the garden when the queen has retired, and you shall be given the justice you deserve.'

Tressilian withdrew, and the earl with a sort of rapture said to himself, 'Heaven favours me at last, and has put within my reach the wretch who has wronged me. Midnight at latest will bring me vengeance.' He rejoined the queen, and immediately his presence of mind was once more put to the test.

'You come in time, my lord,' said Elizabeth, 'to decide a dispute. Sir Richard Varney has just asked our permission to leave the castle with his sick lady; but the Duchess of Rutland advises delay. He has, she says, shown himself so charmed with these ladies of ours that he will carry his poor insane wife no farther than the lake, plunge her in, and return to make up his loss from among the ladies of our court. What do you say, my lord? Do you think he is capable of playing such a villanous trick?'

Leicester was confounded by this question, but managed to reply, 'The ladies think too ill of our sex if they imagine we could inflict such a fate upon an innocent woman.'

Elizabeth gave Varney the permission he asked for, and he left immediately. Leicester too would gladly have gone, but it was midnight before the queen's retirement set him free. He hastened to his apartment and asked for Varney, only to be told that he had left the castle an hour before. He then ordered Lambourne, who had not gone with his master, to be summoned.

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'Varney is over zealous,' he said to himself, 'and has shown himself too eager to rid me of this obstacle which stands between me and my ambition. I may attain it without her death. We must not be too hasty; one victim at a time is enough, and that victim awaits me.'

He hastily wrote a letter commanding Varney to proceed no further in the matter relating to the countess, and to return at once; if the need of keeping his charge in safety prevented his immediate return, he was to send back the signet-ring. This letter he gave to Lambourne with strict injunctions to ride fast and deliver it into Varney's own hands.

The earl changed his dress for a very plain one, and throwing his cloak around him went to keep his appointment with Tressilian. The full moon shone in a cloudless summer sky as he passed along the garden-walk with thoughts far removed from the beauty of the night. 'I have been deeply injured,' he thought, 'but I will restrict my revenge to what is manly and noble. Amy has been false to me, and the union which she has broken shall not bar me from the high career to which fate calls me. There are means of ending our union without destroying life. Oceans shall roll between us, and their waves shall keep the deadly secret.'

Tressilian approached from the shadow of a portico and made a profound bow, to which the earl replied with a haughty nod and the words, 'You asked for a secret meeting, sir. I am here, and attentive.'

'My lord,' said Tressilian, 'I am so desirous to find a patient and even a favourable hearing, that I first assure you that I am not your enemy. I am a friend, but neither a dependant nor a partisan of the Earl of Sussex, and have long avoided court intrigues as unsuited to my character and temper.'

'No doubt, sir,' answered Leicester; 'but there are intrigues of love as well as of ambition.'

'I perceive, my lord,' said Tressilian, 'that you attach

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too much importance to my early affection for the unfortunate lady of whom I would speak.'

'You speak too much of yourself, sir,' said the earl; 'an important subject, doubtless, but one which does not deeply concern me. Proceed, and speak to the purpose.'

'I will, my lord,' answered Tressilian. 'I have to request you for an account of the unhappy Amy Robsart. She escaped from an unlawful and perilous state of confinement, hoping to appeal with success to her unworthy husband, and made me promise that I would not interfere till she had used her own efforts to have her rights acknowledged by him. She is now hidden in some secret place in this castle, I do not know with what design. I speak with authority given me by her father—this ill-fated marriage must be judged upon by the queen, and the lady restored to her father. This matter concerns your lordship's honour.'

The earl, being utterly ignorant of Tressilian's point of view, listened to this demand as if petrified with astonishment, which rapidly gave way to violent anger. 'Did I ever hear so shameless a villain?' he said. 'Draw, and defend yourself!'

He struck Tressilian sharply with his sheathed sword, and then drawing the weapon stood ready to attack. The blow, and the fury of the earl's language and attitude caused Tressilian no less amazement, but there was no time for reflection or explanation, and he had to draw his sword to defend himself. Though he was perhaps not so skilled a swordsman as Leicester, he maintained the fight with coolness and dexterity for a few minutes, during which neither combatant was wounded. Suddenly voices were heard, and the steps of men advancing hastily.

'We are interrupted,' said Leicester; 'follow me.' He led Tressilian into a recess behind a fountain, just in time to escape the observation of some yeomen of the guard. When they had passed the earl said, 'If you have courage to end this fight, be ready when the court goes forth to-morrow. I shall find a time and place.'

peter = rock ; stone

'My lord,' said Tressilian, 'at another time I might have asked the meaning of this strange and furious hatred, but the blow you have laid on my shoulder wounds my honour too deeply, and calls for satisfaction.'

They parted, and Leicester made his way to the private passage to his own apartments. At the entrance he met Lord Hunsdon, the officer in command of the guard. 'Are you awakened too with this alarm?' said the old soldier. 'The nights are as noisy as the day in this castle of yours. Some two hours ago I was wakened by the screams of that poor brain-sick Lady Varney, whom her husband was forcing away, and now there is a brawl in the garden.'

The first part of the old man's news went through the earl's heart like a knife; to the second he replied that he too had heard the sound of fighting, and had come down to see who had dared to draw swords in the vicinity of the queen. To give colour to this excuse he accompanied the rough old lord to the garden. Nothing, of course, had been discovered of the offenders, and they returned to their chambers, Hunsdon growling as he went, 'Unless your lordship will be less liberal with your ale and wine, I foresee that some of these good fellows will become acquainted with the inside of the prison-house.'

CHAPTER XXII

LEICESTER CONFESSES

Next day after breakfast, when the queen and her court were engaged in witnessing a mock battle, representing in burlesque a fight between the English and the Danes, offered for the amusement of their beloved sovereign by the men of the neighbouring town of Coventry, Leicester slipped away from her presence, followed by Tressilian, who had been watching him from a short distance. Mounting

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two horses that had been kept ready behind a thicket, they rode at a gallop to a retired spot in the park, surrounded by leafy oaks.

'Here there is no risk of interruption,' said the earl, as he drew his sword.

Tressilian at once followed his example, but as he drew his weapon he could not resist saying, 'My lord, I am known to be a man who fears dishonour more than death, and therefore I may ask, without seeming to shun the danger of this combat, why your lordship has dared to offer me such a mark of disgrace.'

'If you do not wish it repeated, defend yourself,' said the earl, as he began the fight. This time he fought with more caution, and his skill soon proved too great for his opponent. He forced Tressilian's sword out of his hand, and when the latter tried instantly to grapple with him, he threw him to the ground and placed his foot upon his breast. 'Now confess your villany, and prepare for death,' he said.

'I have no villany or wrong against you to confess,' answered Tressilian, 'and am better prepared than you for death. May God forgive you.'

'No wrong!' exclaimed Leicester. 'Then die a liar, as you have lived!' As he spoke he drew back his arm to strike a fatal blow, when it was suddenly seized from behind. Dickie Sludge, who had followed and crept up to the combatants unseen, had thrown himself bravely upon the earl, and was now clinging desperately to his sword-arm. In a shrill voice he implored the earl to pause a moment.

'My folly,' he said, 'has caused these bloody quarrels. Only read this letter, and then do as you please.'

The sight of the letter, tied with a long tress of beautiful brown hair, and addressed in a hand which he instantly recognized, caused the earl to change colour. He snatched it from Dickie's hand, undid the knot with trembling fingers, and hurriedly read the contents. The letter

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dropped from his hand as he staggered back and leaned against a tree. It was Amy's letter, telling him of her persecution at Cumnor, her escape and her arrival at Kenilworth, explaining her presence in Tressilian's room, and praying that a more suitable resting-place might be assigned to her without delay; she begged him only to free her from the guardianship of Varney, and concluded with assurances of her most devoted love and obedience.

'Take my sword, Tressilian,' the earl said at last, 'and pierce my heart as I would have pierced yours. I have wrongfully accused an upright man and the most honourable of women.'

'My lord,' said Tressilian, 'you have done me great wrong, but I believe that it was by some error.'

'Error, indeed!' said Leicester, and handed him the letter. 'Wretched boy, why have you brought this letter so late?' But Dickie would give no explanation beyond saying that he was not the original messenger.

Having read the letter, Tressilian addressed Leicester. 'It seems that my own quarrel with you is ended, my lord; but I have still to discover, if Varney is not Amy Robsart's husband, for whom she left her father's house.'

'For me,' cried Leicester with a voice like thunder, 'for me—her misguided, blinded, most unworthy husband! She is as surely Countess of Leicester as I am Earl.'

'Then, my lord,' said Tressilian, when he had recovered from his astonishment at this news, 'my duty to Sir Hugh Robsart compels me to carry this matter to the queen, that the countess's rank may be duly acknowledged.'

'You shall not need, sir,' replied the earl, haughtily; 'no voice but my own shall proclaim my infamy. To Elizabeth herself will I tell it, and then I will ride for Cumnor Place with the speed of life and death!' So saying he threw himself on his horse and rode at full gallop to the castle.

Tressilian followed more slowly, taking with him Dickie

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Sludge, who told him on the way all he knew. He had, he confessed, stolen the letter from Wayland in revenge for his secrecy about the lady, intending to give it back in the evening, when he thought he was sure to meet him at the pageant on the lake. But Wayland disappeared, and his own attempts to deliver the letter into Leicester's hands had been repulsed by insolent servants. Once he nearly succeeded, when Leicester stood near the crowd at the pageant in the hall, but he had been interrupted by Tressilian himself. On that occasion, however, he had been near enough to overhear their appointment in the garden. He had hidden himself there, and it was he who had given the guard the alarm and interrupted the fight. He had watched them closely again that very day, and seeing them ride off together he had followed, with the results that have been related.

The mock battle was over when Tressilian reached the castle, and he saw men standing together in groups and talking eagerly, like people who had been startled by strange and alarming news. The first person of his own acquaintance to meet him was Sir Nicholas Blount, who accosted him with, 'God help you, Tressilian; you are fitter to be a clown than a courtier. Why cannot you remain in attendance as you ought? Her Majesty has called for you and waits for you, and you are in no fit state to attend upon her.'

'What is the matter?' said Tressilian.

'No one knows,' replied Blount. 'Only Leicester has galloped into the castle demanding an audience of the queen, and is now with her, and Burleigh, and Walsingham —whether it is a matter of treason or not, no one knows. For heaven's sake, go to my chamber and put on my new silken hose.'

Disregarding his friend's well-meant advice, and leaving Dickie in his charge, Tressilian made his way through the great hall, and was shown into a room where he found the

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queen pacing to and fro in violent agitation. Leicester was kneeling on the ground with his unbuckled sword lying before him. He was apparently under arrest, for Lord Shrewsbury, the Earl Marshal of England, stood beside him, holding his baton of office. Lord Burleigh was attempting to pacify the queen. 'Madam,' he said, 'remember that you are a queen—the mother of your people. Do not give way to this storm of passion.'

'Burleigh,' said Elizabeth, with a tear in her proud and angry eye, 'you are a statesman—you do not know half the scorn that this man has poured upon me.'

With deep reverence Burleigh took her hand and led her towards a window away from the others. 'Madam,' he said, 'I am also a man—a man grown old in your service, with no wish but for your glory and happiness; I know—I do know. Beware lest others guess what as yet they do not know. Only be yourself, my queen, and soar far above this weakness.'

Elizabeth saw the wisdom of this advice. She turned from Burleigh and paced the floor till her features had recovered their wonted calmness and dignity. Then she approached Leicester and said, 'My Lord of Leicester, you are free; rise and take up your sword.' Seating herself upon a chair of state she continued, 'We will now inquire into this affair. Tressilian, step forward and say what you know.'

Tressilian told his story, generously saying of Leicester as little as he could, and making no mention of having being forced by him to fight.

'We will take that Wayland,' said the queen, after she had heard him, 'into our own service, and place the boy under the Secretary, that he may learn to treat letters with more discretion. You, Tressilian, did wrong in not telling us the whole truth before; yet, having given your promise to this unhappy lady, it was the part of a man and a gentleman to keep it. My Lord of Leicester, it is now your turn to tell us the truth.'

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Leicester's confession was wrenched from him piecemeal, but he concealed the fact that he had assented to Varney's design upon the life of the countess. In spite of the counter-

THE EARL OF LEICESTER CONFESSING HIS MARRIAGE

orders he had sent by Lambourne, he was eager to set out for Cumnor Place to make sure that this design should not be carried out, but the queen seemed to take a delight in torturing him with her questions, and prolonged them beyond the limit of his patience.

'Madam,' he said at length, like a deer that turns at

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bay, 'I have been much to blame, but my guilt was not unprovoked by you. If beauty and kindness can lead astray the heart of a man, I can plead both as the cause of my concealing this secret from your Majesty.' He took care to say this in a voice that reached none but Elizabeth, who was for a moment taken aback by having the blame laid upon her own conduct. Perceiving this, Leicester continued, 'May I remind your Grace that yesterday morning you thought my rashness and folly but a light offence?'

The queen fixed her eyes upon him while she replied, 'Now, my lord, your boldness passes the bounds of belief as well as patience! What ho! my lords, come all of you and hear the news. My Lord of Leicester's stolen marriage has lost us a husband, and England a king! One wife at a time was not enough for him, and he designed for us the honour of being his second. Is this not too insolent—that I could not grace him with a few marks of court favour, but he must presume that my hand and crown are at his disposal?'

She left the room and entered the great hall, where the expectant courtiers were astonished to hear her announce, 'The revels of Kenilworth are not yet ended, my lords and ladies—we are to celebrate the noble owner's marriage. I see that you are dying of curiosity to know the happy bride. It is Amy Robsart, the same who figured in yesterday's pageant as the wife of his servant Varney.'

The earl approached her and humbly craved her permission to travel to Cumnor Place. 'To fetch home your bride, I suppose?' said Elizabeth. 'But, my lord, it would be scant courtesy to leave us here without a host, and we cannot incur such disgrace. Tressilian shall go instead of you, and with him some gentleman of our own household. Whom will you choose, Tressilian?'

Tressilian suggested the name of Raleigh.

'Aye,' said the queen, 'he is a good choice. To deliver a lady from prison is an appropriate adventure for a young knight. Take a sufficient force with you, and bring the

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lady here with all honour. Lose no time, and God be with you.' They bowed and left the queen's presence.

For the rest of the day the earl experienced the lot of a disgraced courtier, the coldness of alienated friends and the triumph of open enemies. He retired early to his chamber, resolved to leave court life and spend a quiet future in the company of his beloved Amy.

CHAPTER XXIII

TRESSILIAN COMES TOO LATE

When Varney left the Earl of Leicester, he had proposed to set forth early in the morning with the countess, but, reflecting that the earl might relent from his purpose, he changed his mind and determined to start immediately. He sent for Lambourne, and was very angry to find that he had gone out on some frolic of his own, no one knew where. Another servant was ordered to have horses ready and a conveyance for the countess.

The assistance of Anthony Foster was necessary, and there was no difficulty in finding him. He had travelled to Kenilworth only to announce Amy's escape to his employer, and his unsociable nature made him avoid all the festivities of the castle by keeping to his own room. He was asleep when Varney entered and shook him by the arm. 'Thieves! thieves!' he roared as he started up in alarm; 'I will die to save my gold, my hard-won gold. Where is Janet? Is Janet safe?'

'Safe enough, you bellowing fool,' said Varney. 'Wake up.'

Soon Foster was wide awake. 'What is the meaning of this untimely visit? It forebodes nothing good!' he said.

'Your prophecy is false,' returned Varney; 'it forebodes that you will become sole master of Cumnor Place, whither we are to escort the lady back again.'

'Is that indeed all?' said Foster. 'Your face is deadly pale, and you are not moved by trifles—is that all?'

That—and maybe a trifle more,' said Varney. 'Never mind my face, but be up and doing. Think of Cumnor Place as your own; no gipsy shall cut as much as a broom, no boy shall dare to take a bird's nest, without paying you for it. That is right—put on your clothes as fast as possible—don't forget your pistols—and let us away.'

The horror of the countess may be imagined, when, starting from a broken slumber, she saw at her bedside Varney, the man whom she most feared and hated. It was even a consolation to see that he was not alone, though she had reason to fear Foster too.

'Madam,' said Varney, 'there is no time for ceremony. My Lord of Leicester sends you his orders to return with us immediately to Cumnor Place. Here is his signet-ring in token of his authority.'

'It is false!' said the countess; 'you have stolen it; you are capable of any villany!'

'It is so true, madam,' said Varney, 'that if you do not instantly rise and prepare to accompany us, we must compel you to obey.'

It was at this threat that Amy screamed so loudly as to be heard by Lord Hunsdon, who would have instantly rushed to her aid had he not believed that she was insane. Perceiving that her cries were useless the countess appealed to Foster and besought him, if he held his own daughter's honour dear, to save her from this violence.

'Wives must obey their husbands, madam—there 's Scripture authority for it,' replied Foster; 'and if you will dress yourself and come with us quietly, no one will lay a finger on you while I can draw a pistol-trigger.' Varney, too, assured her of all safety and honour, and added that her husband would be at Cumnor Place within twenty-four hours after they had reached it.

The poor lady had no resource save to comply, and they left the room. Weeping, trembling, and praying, she rose and dressed as slowly as she could, till the impatience of

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Varney at last obliged her to declare herself ready. Leaning on Foster's arm, while Varney kept at some distance, she was led to the conveyance that awaited her, and the party set out for Cumnor.

Varney rode at some distance in the rear, and they had not gone more than ten miles when Lambourne galloped up behind him. His master greeted him with bitter abuse for his idleness and drunkenness, but he was in no mood to receive it humbly. The earl's letter countermanding his first orders to Varney had been insecurely fastened, and Lambourne had opened and read it, thus gaining knowledge of a secret which he thought put him more on a level with Varney.

'Look you, Sir Richard,' he said, 'I will take no insolence from the best knight that ever wore spurs. I was detained by the Earl of Leicester, who has trusted me fully, and I know his mind in this matter better than you. Here are his orders. You must pay the utmost respect to the countess, and I must carry back his signet.'

'Did he say so indeed?' replied Varney. 'You know all then? Was any one present when my lord spoke to you?'

'Not a soul,' replied Lambourne. 'Do you think my lord would trust any one with such matters except an approved man of action like myself? And now, Sir Richard, I serve you no longer; I look to have a better master.'

Varney glanced all around. His companions were far ahead and no one was in sight. 'Take your payment first, you fool!' he said, and with a pistol he shot Lambourne through the body. The wretch fell from his horse without a groan; and Varney, dismounting, rifled his pockets and turned them out to make it appear that he had been murdered by robbers. He kept the earl's letter, but threw everything else that he found into a small river that crossed the path, and rode on congratulating himself on having skilfully avoided the necessity of obeying the earl's second commands.

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The following night, as they approached Cumnor, Varney said to Foster, 'We must consider how to lodge my lady in safety. Her own apartments are not secure enough; we must lodge her in the stronghold where you keep your gold.'

Foster, in alarm, protested that he had no gold; but Varney continued, 'Who cares for your gold, you stupid brute? If I wanted it, I would find a better way to take it. The lady must be placed in your bedroom, which you have so carefully guarded, and you can take her apartments. I dare say the earl will never ask back their rich furniture from you.' This consideration satisfied Foster, and he rode forward to prepare for the countess's reception.

On her arrival at the mansion the countess was disappointed and alarmed to find that Janet was not there. Her father had sent her to the care of an aunt after the escape of the countess, that she might not, as he said, learn any more of the court trick of lying. The alarm of the countess was not lessened by hearing that she was not to go to her own rooms, and it was only the repeated assurance that the earl himself would arrive next day, and that she could secure herself by fastening the door on the inside, that induced her to follow Foster quietly up a stair of great height in a part of the building which she had never yet visited.

At the top of the stair a short narrow gallery made of oak led to the door of Foster's room. Opening the door, he allowed the countess to pass in and to close and bar it behind her. Varney meanwhile had lurked behind on the stair, but came up when he heard the door barred. Foster pointed out to him that a part of the wooden gallery was arranged like a trap-door on hinges, and could be dropped so as to cut off all communication between the stair and the bedroom. He had devised this as a means of securing his room from invasion, and now he lowered the gallery so as to make it impossible for the countess to come out.

Varney looked with great attention at the machinery,

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and into the abyss which was opened by the trap-door, and which led down to the deepest vault of the mansion. He then followed Foster down the stair. 'I must seek Alasco,' he said. 'There is work for him to do.' Foster groaned, but made no remonstrance, and went to procure some supper.

After some time Varney returned, very pale, but yet with the usual sneer on his face. 'Our friend,' he said, 'has gone.'

'What do you mean?' said Foster. 'Run away—with my forty pounds that he promised to multiply a thousand-fold? I will have them back! I will follow him!'

'You will have to go far, to catch him.'

'What?—is he dead?'

'Aye, truly he is,' said Varney. 'He has been mixing some of his foul medicines, and the fumes have poisoned him. He was swollen like a corpse three days old. Pah! give me a cup of wine. I have seen enough to spoil my appetite.'

Foster rose and hastened to the door, intending to go and see for himself; but a superstitious dread seized him and he returned to his seat.

'We shall miss Alasco and his medicine,' said Varney, 'for without him how is the countess to be disposed of?'

'God! Sir Richard, must that, then, be done?'

'Aye, in very truth, Anthony, or you will never be master of Cumnor Place.'

'I foresaw it would come to that,' said Foster; 'but how, Sir Richard, how? Not to win the world would I lay hands on her.'

'I will teach you a trick, Anthony. That trap-door of yours—it will remain apparently secure in its place, will it not, though the supports are withdrawn beneath?'

'Yes,' said Foster, 'so long as it is not trodden on.'

'Why, then, the lady will die in attempting her escape,' said Varney, 'and how could you or I help it, honest Tony. Let us go to bed; we will lay our snare to-morrow.'

Next day Foster visited the countess under the pretext

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of inquiring after her convenience and comfort. Her mildness, patience, and helplessness appealed to him so strongly that he could not help earnestly advising her not to cross the threshold of her room on any account whatever until the earl should come. Quieting his conscience with having given this warning, he left the countess's door unsecured on the outside, and then under Varney's eye he withdrew the supports of the trap in the gallery, so that it remained in its usual position but ready to fall at the slightest touch.

The two conspirators retired to the ground floor to await the result, but they waited long in vain. 'Surely,' said Varney, when his patience was nearly exhausted, 'never was a woman fool enough to neglect so fair an opportunity of escape!'

'Perhaps she will await her husband's return,' said Foster.

'True! I had not thought of that,' said Varney. He rushed out, and in a few minutes the sound of a horse was heard in the courtyard, followed by a whistle like the earl's usual signal. The instant after, the door of the countess's room opened and the trap-door gave way. There was a rushing sound—a heavy fall—a faint groan—and all was over.

'Is the bird caught?—is the deed done?' said Varney, as he re-entered.

'O God, forgive us!' replied Anthony Foster.

'Why, you fool,' said Varney, 'your work is done and your reward secure. So finish all our troubles. I did not think I could mimic the earl's whistle so well. Let us now think how the alarm should be given—the body is to remain where it is.'

But vengeance was already upon them. In the midst of their consultation Tressilian and Raleigh broke in and seized Varney, while Foster fled, and knowing every corner of the intricate old house escaped all search.

to mimic = to imitate

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Varney seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in pointing out the remains of the murdered countess, and made no mystery of the crime or of its motives. Next morning he was found dead in the room in which he had been secured, having swallowed some poison, probably prepared by Alasco, which he had secretly carried upon his person.

The fate of Anthony Foster, who suddenly and completely disappeared after the murder, was for long unknown. Janet, after waiting in vain for tidings of her father, took possession of his property, and later conferred it by marriage upon Wayland, who had become an officer in Elizabeth's household. Some years after their death their eldest son and heir, in making some changes in the mansion, discovered a secret cell, in which was found a human skeleton stretched upon an iron chest containing a quantity of gold. Thither Anthony Foster had fled for concealment, but, forgetting the key of the spring lock, he had been shut in with his gold and had perished miserably.

The news of the countess's dreadful fate put a sudden end to the revels at Kenilworth. Leicester retired from court for a considerable time, but as his part in the tragedy never became known, the queen at length recalled him. Retribution reached him at last, however, if it is true, as tradition reports, that he died from being given a poison that he had recommended to another person as a cordial.

Sir Hugh Robsart died soon after his daughter, and left his estate to Tressilian; but neither the prospect of an independent country life nor the queen's offers of advancement at court could remove Tressilian's profound melancholy. He at length joined his friend Raleigh in his expedition to Virginia, and, young in years but old in grief, died before his time in that foreign land.